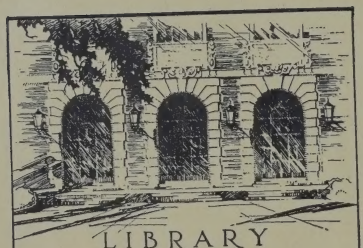

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MAY.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,"

"THE MINISTER'S WIFE," "OMBRA,"

&c., &c.

"*Maggio*
Non ha paraggio."
ITALIAN PROVERB.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1873.

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NOV 3 1953 SEARCY

TO

THE HONOURABLE CAPTAIN

AND

MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL AND ANCIENT GOLF CLUB OF ST. ANDREWS

(Especially to those among that noble Company whom the Author ventures to call Friends)

THIS BOOK

IS

REVERENTIALLY, AND ADMIRINGLY INSCRIBED.

Gordon Ray 15 Aug 52 Barfield 330

MAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE house of Hay-Heriot had been established at Pitcomlie for more centuries than could easily be reckoned. It was neither very rich nor very great, but it was well connected, and had held itself sturdily above the waves of fate like one of the rocks along its wild coast line, often threatened by rising tides, but never submerged. There had never been any great personages in the family to raise it above its natural level, but neither had there been any distinguished profligates or spendthrifts to pull it down. Most of the lairds had been respectable, and those who were not had never been more than moderately

wicked, keeping clear of ruinous vices. The history of the house had been very monotonous, without ups or downs to speak of. In the vicissitudes of the rebellions they had kept clear, being too far south to be seriously compromised; and though a younger son was out in the '45, that did not affect either the character or the circumstances of the family. In short, this was the Hay-Heriot way of sowing its wild oats. Its younger sons were its safety-valve; all that was eccentric in the race ran into those stray branches, leaving the elder son always steady and respectable, a most wise arrangement of nature.

Thus the house itself derived even profit and glory from the adventurous irregularity of its younger members, while its stability was uninjured. Indian curiosities of all kinds, warlike trophies, and the splendid fruit of those pilferings which are not supposed to be picking and stealing when they are the accompaniments of war, decorated the old mansion on every side. A curiously decorated scimitar, which had been taken from Tippoo Saib, hung over the mantelpiece in the

library along with a French sabre from Waterloo, and the shield of a Red Indian barbarically gay with beads and fringes. These were all contributions from the heroic ne'er-do-weels who linked the staidest of households to the tumult and commotion of distant worlds. Sometimes the ne'er-do-weels would cost the head of the house some money, but on the whole the balance was kept tolerably even, and the younger Hay-Heriots conscientiously forbore from leaving orphan children, or other incumbrances, to burden the old house—a considerateness quite unlike the habit of younger sons, which was applauded and envied by many families in the country who had no such exemption.

The present family differed, however, in many respects from the traditions of the race. Thomas Hay-Heriot of Pitcomlie was indeed all that his ancestors had been, an excellent country gentleman, homely in his manners and thrifty in his habits, but hospitable, charitable, and not ungenerous—a man of blameless life and high character. His brother Charles, however, who, according to all the family rules ought to have

been a scapegrace, was not so in the smallest degree, but, on the contrary, as respectable as his elder brother; a man who had never been further than Paris in his life, a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh; a man of method and order, who had done exactly the same thing at the same hour every day for thirty years, and who was as good as a clock to his servants and neighbours. This is not in general an attractive description of a man, but there was a great deal to be said in Uncle Charles' favour, as the reader who has patience to follow out this history will learn.

The fact that he was Uncle Charles will at once reveal one important part of his life. He had never married, he had always been more or less a member of his brother's household, and now, when age began to creep upon both, lived almost continually in the home of his youth. It was he who sat in the triangular corner of a settee by the fire with a newspaper in his hand, which he was not reading, in the Pitcomlie drawing-room, on a bright March day not very many years ago, in the half hour which preceded luncheon in that

orderly house. We are aware that we ought to have afforded a glimpse of Pitcomlie House, before thus dragging the reader head and shoulders into its domestic centre—but after all it is the interior which is the most important, and this is how it looked.

A long room with three large windows opening upon a lawn, beyond which surged and swelled an often angry and boisterous sea. The fireplace was opposite the central window, and the room had been handsomely furnished forty years before, and bore that air of continuance and use which in itself gives a charm to all human habitations.

It had, however, as all such rooms have, various points of contact with the immediate present, in the shape of low chintz-covered easy-chairs and other modern vanities. Uncle Charles' chimney-corner was formed by placing an arm across the long settee fitted to the wall, thus leaving him a roomy triangular seat at the end, where his lean limbs got all the benefit of the warmth. He was a man of nearly sixty, with scanty fair hair, scarcely touched with grey, a forehead which

wrinkled up in folds or smoothed itself miraculously out according to his moods as he talked, and a pair of light yellowish grey eyes with scanty eyelashes, also light in colour, over which he puckered his brows continually, being short-sighted. He was one of the thinnest of men, as light and agile as many a boy, and sat with his long legs crossed in the acutest of angles.

His brother stood with his back to the fire, older by two years, and heavier by at least six stone. He was dressed in grey morning clothes, with boots and leather gaiters, and an atmosphere of the fields and free air about him. Indeed, he had just come in from his home-farm, which he managed very carefully, and by which he proudly declared he had never lost a penny. There was no one else in the room. The walls were painted gray-green and hung with family portraits. The round table at the east end—for in this part of Scotland everything is spoken of geographically—was laden with books; and in the west end the room blossomed out into a deeply recessed bay window, half veiled with lace curtains, within

which stood one easy-chair and small table. This recess, and indeed the air of the place generally, betrayed the habitation of a woman, and one whose tastes and "ways" were very influential—but no woman was present. The aspect of the room was south and west, so that the sharp east wind then blowing outside did not affect so much as might have been feared the temperature within. An east wind in Fife is not always the grey and withering misery it is in other places; under some peculiar modifications of the atmosphere it makes the sea blue and the sky clear, and such was the effect on this particular morning. This it may be imagined was an effect most deeply to be desired at Pitcomlie, which so far, at least, as the drawing-room was concerned, was like a ship at sea, seeing little besides the water; but as the Hay-Heriots had all been, so to speak, born and bred in an east wind, they were more indifferent than most people to its penetrating power.

"I have another letter from Tom," said Mr. Heriot, sighing and raising his arms with his coat tails under them.

"Always wanting something?" said Uncle Charles, with a shrug.

"Well, when all's done and said, he is the first to be considered," said the laird, with a faint glimmer as of incipient resentment. "It is to him that everything must come; he must carry on the name like his fathers before him. Being a younger son yourself, Charlie, you have your prejudices, as is but natural. Your word is always for the others—never for Tom."

Uncle Charles gave another shrug of his lean shoulders. "Tom cares little for my good word," he said, "and has little need of it. You're quite capable of spoiling your son yourself, so far as I can see, without me to help. The girls are my thought; young men can shift for themselves, and it was always the way of our family to let them; but the girls, Thomas—there's two of them. There's my niece Marjory, as fine a young woman as any in the county—"

"Oh, ay, May; she's the first in your thoughts. But girls are neither here nor there," said Mr. Heriot, "they have their pickle money, more or less, and there's an end of them. What's

Marjory to do with money? What can she do at her age—"

"Marry, I suppose, like the rest," said Uncle Charles.

"Marry!" said the father. "I don't see any necessity for my part; she's a great deal better as she is, with you and me."

"That may be or may'nt be," said Uncle Charles; "but at least you are not the man to say so; you married twice yourself."

"And a great deal I have made by it," said Mr. Heriot, with a mixture of complaint and discontent. "My first wife was an excellent creature, an excellent creature, as you know; but she was taken away from me just when I and the bairns wanted her most. Providence is very queer in some things. Just when May was a growing girl, and Tom at the age when a woman is of use, their mother was taken away. It is not for us to complain, but it's a strange way of acting, a very strange way of acting. I could not take the responsibility of guiding my hinds in such a manner. Well, and then I married poor Jeanie, hoping she would keep

everything in order, and set the house to rights—and what does she do but slip away too, poor thing, leaving me with a helpless bit baby on my hands? A great deal I have made by it that you should quote my example. What would Marjory do to marry? She is far better as she is, mistress and more of this house, petted as no husband would ever pet her, getting her own way in everything. Bless my soul, man, what would you like for her more?"

"Well, a house of her own," said Uncle Charles, no way daunted, "and a good man. I have not your experience, Thomas, but I suppose that's the best for a woman. She is more of your way of thinking than mine, but it's our duty to think for her, you know. We're old now, and Tom's extravagant—and she's not precisely growing younger herself."

"Toots, she's young enough," said the laird; and then he began to walk up and down the room, still with his coat-tails under his arms. "To tell the truth," he said, "Marjory's marriage would be the worst thing that could happen for us. I would not stand in her way if it was

for her good. When there's a family of daughters, of course it becomes of consequence; what else can they do, poor things? but Marjory is in a very different position. Poor little Milly is not ten, and what would you and I do, left in a house like this, with a bit creature of ten years old? Her sister is her natural guardian; and what can be more natural than that May should take care of her father's house and keep everything going? What can a woman want more? A house of her own! isn't this house her own? and as nice a house as any in Fife; and as for a man—if she knew as much about men as I do, Charlie, or you either for that matter—"

Uncle Charles gave a half-stifled, chuckling laugh. The humour of this remonstrance overcame his graver sense; and that Marjory's marriage would have been as great a drawback —perhaps a greater misfortune—to himself than even to her father there could be no doubt.

"I don't say but what that's an indisputable argument," he replied; "she might get a bonny bargain, and repent it all her days. But there's

the luncheon bell, and where is she? I don't think I ever knew her to be late before."

"Are you not going to wait?" said the laird.

Mr. Charles had hoisted himself up at the sound of the bell; he had folded his newspaper and laid it down upon his seat. He had picked up his short-sighted spectacles, which lay as they always did, when he was reading, on the edge of the wainscot, which was high and served him as a stand; and he had lifted the poker to administer, as he invariably did at this hour, a farewell poke to the fire before leaving it. He turned round upon his brother, looking at him over his shoulder with the poker in his hand.

"Wait!" he said. It was altogether a new idea. Marjory was punctuality itself, trained to it from her earliest years, and time was inexorable at Pitcomlie, waiting for no man or woman either. "Wait?" he repeated, laying down the poker. "Thomas, my man, you're not well."

"Bah!" said the laird, taking up the poker which his brother had dropped, and applying such a blow to the coal as sent blazing sparks all over the hearth-rug. It was exactly what might

have been expected, but his brother stood helplessly and looked at him, feeling that chaos itself had come, until the smell of the burning wool startled them both. Mr. Heriot stooped down, which did not agree with him, to pick up the smouldering sparks with his hands, out of which the morsels of fire tumbled again, sprinkling little pin-points of destruction all over the Turkey rug. Mr. Charles ran and opened the window, which let in a steady strong blast from the Firth, enough to wither up the very soul of any man not to the manner born. "Bless my soul!" they both said, between the fire and the cold, in confusion and discouragement. It was entirely Marjory's fault. Why was not Marjory at home? What did she mean by staying out at an hour when she was so much wanted? Mr. Heriot spoke quite sharply when old Fleming, the butler, came to answer the bell. "Where is Miss Marjory?" he said. "Come and pick up these cinders, and don't stand and stare at me. Where is Miss Marjory, I ask you? What do you mean by ringing the bell when she's not here?"

"Lord bless us, Sir," said old Fleming, gazing

at his master with a consternation beyond words. "What for should I no ring the bell? I've rung it night and morning, midday and dinner-time, in a' times and seasons, even when there was death in the house; and what for should we hold our peace now?"

"Confound you!" said the laird, and then he recollected himself, and put on that peculiar politeness which is with some men a symptom of wrath. "Be so good as to leave the room at once, and bring me word if Miss Marjory has come in," he said.

Mr. Charles by this time had closed the window, subdued by his brother's unusual fractiousness. "Tom's letter must have been more trying than ordinary," he said to himself, and then in the curious pause that followed he looked at his watch. A quarter to two o'clock! In the memory of man it had not been known that the Pitcomlie household should be later than half-past one, in sitting down to its luncheon. Mr. Charles did not know what to do with himself. In his scheme of existence this half hour, and no other, was filled with lunch. He had other duties for all

the other half hours, and every one of them must be pushed out of its proper place by May's singular error. This fretted him more than he could say. He walked about the room with his hands in his pockets and in much bewilderment of soul. "If you will not come, I will go by myself," he said at length to his brother, "I can't afford to lose all my afternoon. May must have stayed in Comlie with old Aunt Jean for lunch."

"Lose your afternoon!" said Mr. Heriot. "Bless my soul, what's your afternoon, an idle man! If it had been me that had complained"—

"There's Scotch collops," said old Fleming, suddenly appearing at the door, "and chicken with cucumber. They'll both spoil if they're no eaten; and Miss Marjory's not to be seen, no even from the towerhead where I sent little James to look. You'll do her little good waiting, if I may make so bold to say so, and the good meat will be spoiled."

"I told you so," said Mr. Charles, who profited by this interruption to march briskly past Fleming and hasten to the dining-room. Mr. Heriot followed him with a less satisfied air; and the

two gentlemen placed themselves at table, and being hungry eat a hearty meal and said no more about Marjory. Her absence indeed was nothing to be anxious about, and the chicken and cucumber was very good, as were also the Scotch collops, a dish for which Mrs. Simpson, the cook, was famous. Mrs. Simpson, indeed, was famous for a great many things; she was partly the creation and partly the instructress of Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot himself, to whom she had been solemnly bequeathed by one of his old friends in Edinburgh, who had bragged of her greatly in his lifetime, and had meant to survive her, and publish her lore in a book. But it was she who had survived instead, and Mr. Charles was of opinion that he himself had immensely improved her. She was supposed to be the last depository of many old Scotch recipes, the only person who knew how to send up Friar's chicken, and a howtowdie with drappit eggs. The Scotch collops were brown and fragrant, sending a delicious flavour through all the house, and the little momentary annoyance of the past half hour sank into insignificance before them. The two gen-

tlemen made a hearty meal, both of them having had fresh air enough to make it acceptable, and talked of other things. With Fleming behind his master's chair, even Tom's letter became no matter for discussion, and though the table with its two vacant places looked somewhat dreary, there was no further remark made on that subject. "They are dining with old Aunt Jean," Mr. Charles said to himself; and as for his brother he was a little ashamed of the fuss he had made. That fuss had not been, as he very well knew, for Marjory's absence, but because Tom's letter was such a one as irritates a parent; and Mr. Charles' readiness to side against Tom in all domestic controversies irritated the father still further, who did not choose that any one but himself should blame his heir. Indeed one of Mr. Heriot's chief grievances against his eldest son was this way he had of laying himself open to animadversion. He felt it was against the dignity of all eldest sons and heads of houses that this should be possible. The Charlies of life, the younger sons, the girls, were open to reasonable discussion; but when the heir thus exposed

himself, all family discipline and subordination was in danger. It was almost as bad as if he himself, Thomas Hay-Heriot of Pitcomlie, had been openly criticised by his family. And Tom was a young man who continually laid himself open to animadversion. Even Fleming had been known to have his fling at him, and the only one of Marjory's revolutionary qualities which really annoyed her father, was her want of proper respect for her brother's position. He had been the eldest son himself, and had always been treated with the highest consideration; and the head of the house entertained very strongly this *esprit de corps*. He made no further allusion therefore to the subject which really engrossed all his thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

WHILE her father and uncle were thus fuming over her absence, Marjory Hay-Heriot, with her little sister, had been making her way quietly about the little town of Comlie, whither they had ridden down in the morning, tempted by the sunshine, after some days of rainy weather. Comlie was a little old clean and quaint place, an old-fashioned Fife borough, devoted to fishing in its lower parts, but possessing such a High Street as not one of all its sister-towns possessed. This High Street had a wide causeway, clean and straight, and a broad footpath into which many old-fashioned large houses stepped forward with their white gables, in a true picturesque old Scotch way, telling of better times and character-

istics more decided than our own. A quaint little semi-metropolitan air was about this silent street, through which the broad sunshine fell with few shadows to obstruct it. A little town-hall with a quaint ancient steeple stood in the middle of the street, with one square unglazed window protected by iron rails, the window of the town Bridewell, raised just above the heads of the passers by, and looking as like the little town prison of an Italian mountain village as two similar things could look in places so unlike. At the west end was an old inn, a little hostel which, no doubt, was doing a good trade in the days when queens and courts were at Falkland Palace, and archbishops reigned in St. Andrews. The houses on the south side of the street with their projecting gables, whitewashed and many-windowed, looked out upon the sea to the back, over the fringe of fisher cottages which lay lower, close to the beach. At the east end of the town stood the church, an old church cobbled into mediocrity, but still displaying to instructed eyes the lines of its original structure, and tempting archæologists with hopes of restoration. It was

surrounded by a churchyard full of monuments of the sixteenth century, with skulls and cross-bones and urns and puffing cherubs. It is astonishing how many dead people belonging to that century could afford to leave behind them those cumbrous masses of stone. The Manse, a solid, and in its way, spacious square stone house, stood at a little distance overlooking the sea; and outside the church gates, where the broad street had widened into a kind of triangular *place*, there were several "genteel" houses—one decorated with iron gates and trees in front, but the rest old, of characteristic Fife architecture, each with its white gable. The sea is the background to everything in this country, and to-day it was blue, a keen and chill, but brilliant tone of colour, throwing up the whitewashed houses and light grey stone with a brightness almost worthy of Italy; though no Italian wind, unless, indeed, a Tramontana fresh from the snowy hills, ever penetrated human bones like that steady blast from the east, which came natural to the people of Comlie.

Marjory had left her horse and little Milly her

tiny pony at John Horsburgh's inn, and they were now going up and down the silent street in the sunshine about their various businesses, holding up their riding-skirts, the little girl keeping very close by her sister's side like a little shadow, and communicating with the outer world almost exclusively by means of a large pair of limpid blue eyes, clear as heaven, and wide open, which said almost all that Milly had to say, and learned a great deal more than Milly ever betrayed. Wherever Marjory went, this little shade went with her, sometimes holding by her dress, always treading in her very footsteps, a creature with no independent existence of her own, any more than if she had been part of Marjory's gown, or an ornament she wore. As for Marjory herself, she went along the street of Comlie with the free yet measured step of a princess, aware that every eye in the place (there were not many visible), was turned to her; but so used to that homage that it gave her only a fine backing of moral strength and support, and made her neither vain nor proud. Vain! why should Marjory Hay-Heriot be vain? She knew her position exactly

and accepted it, and was aware of all its duties, and considered it natural. She was like a princess in Comlie; she would have told you so simply without more ado, as calm in the consciousness as any young grand-duchess in her hereditary dominions. She had been going over her kingdom that morning, and had found a great many things to do.

At this moment when, if the reader pleases, we shall join ourselves like little Milly to her train, she was coming up from "the shore" as it was called, the fisher-region, where she had been paying a sorrowful visit. One of the boats had gone down in the last gale, a too frequent accident, and a young widow with a three months old baby, a poor young creature who not two years before had left Pitcomlie House to marry her Jamie, was sitting rocking herself and her child in the first stupor of grief, and replying by monosyllables to all the kindly attempts to console her.

"Oh ay, Miss Marjory," "I ken that," "Yes, Mem, its a' true," poor Jean had said, with the weary assent which means so little. Marjory

came back to the High Street with a grave face, and her own mind full of the dreariness of that inevitable assent. What could any woman answer more to the kind voices that bid her bear her trial and have patience, and remember that it is God's will? "Its a' true." May was not of a melancholy mind; but that pitiful assent to everything she had said went to her heart. She walked on with her light step that did no more than *effleurer* the ground, stopping sometimes to nod and smile to some woman at her door.

"All well to-day, Mary?"

"Oh, ay, Miss Marjory, just about our ordinary, nae mair to complain o' than maist puir folk; if thae weary cauld winds would bide away that gie us a' our death."

"This is the first east wind we've had for a fortnight," said Marjory. "I think we have very little reason to complain."

"Ye see I'm frae the south," said the woman; "and my man has a hoast that drives ye wild to hear; and when we havena the east wind in Comlie we have the rain, and the bairns canna

gang to the school, and there's naething but dirt and wet, and misery and quarrelling. It's a weary world, as our grannie says. Whatever the Almighty sends, there's aye something folk would like better."

"But perhaps that might be the folk's fault, and not the Almighty's," suggested Marjory.

"Maybe; I'm no saying," answered Mary Baxter, cautiously. "I hope's a' weel at Pitcomlie, and good news o' the young gentlemen. They tell me Mr. Charles's wife out in India yonder, has another son. Bless us! and I mind himself so well, a curly-headed laddie! It would have been mair like the thing if Mr. Tammas would settle down, and bring hame some bonnie young leddy and gie Mr. Heriot childhers' childher, as it's in the Bible. But there's nae word o' that that I can hear?"

"No, there is no word of that. I hope Nancy is doing well in her new place," said Miss Heriot, changing the subject with the same unconscious artifice which had prompted her humble interlocutor to carry the war into the enemy's country by introducing Charles's marriage and Tom's

bacherlorhood. These two subjects were not pleasing to the house of Heriot; for Tom, the heir, unfortunately, showed no inclination to marry at all, and Charlie in India had become a husband and a father much too soon, contrary to all traditions. Marjory passed on when she had been satisfied on the subject of Nancy, but was stopped a few steps further on by a bare-headed girl in a pretty pink short-gown, the costume of the country, who ran after her with her fair locks falling loose in the wind.

"Eh, Miss Marjory, would you come in and speak to my mither?" cried this new applicant. This was Jenny Patterson, who lived up a stair just behind the Tolbooth, and a little out of Miss Heriot's way. How Jenny admired the young lady as she gathered up her heavy cloth skirts, and with a smile and a nod went on to the well-known door! If Jenny had ever heard of goddesses, just so would she have impersonified a feminine divinity; that mixture of splendid superiority and familiar kindness being of all things the most captivating to the unsophisticated soul. Jenny's brother, who was a watchmaker in Dun-

dee, and held very advanced political opinions, considered her devotion servile, but blushed to feel that he himself shared it whenever he was brought under the same influence. "But it's no the leddy, it's the woman I think of," Radical Jock explained to himself—an explanation as false as most such explanations are.

"Jenny says you want me, Mrs. Patterson," said Marjory, sitting down on the chair which Jenny carefully dusted and placed in front of the fire. It was a small room, with but a little space between the bed and the fire, and with one window veiled by an immense geranium stretched upon a fan-like frame, which was the pride of its mistress's heart, consumed half the air and light in the little place, and curiously enough condescended to grow with splendid luxuriance. Jenny's mother was an invalid, but a good needlewoman, who got through a great deal of "white-seam" in her chair by the fire, and lived, she, her daughter, and her geranium on the earnings thus acquired, supplemented by help from her sons. Jenny stood by smiling and open-mouthed, twisting up the hair which invariably

came down when she flew out into the street on any errand; and little Milly, familiar to the place, actually took the independent step of going to the window, and chirruping to the canary which hung above that geranium forest, and was the best singer in all Comlie, not even excepting the Minister's bullfinch, a strange and foreign bird.

"Dinna think I'm wanting anything from you, Miss Marjory. The worst o' puir folk is that they're aye wanting. Na, na, it was only for a sight o' your face, which does a poor body good, and to read ye my Willie's letter. Jenny, ye taupie, bring me Willie's letter. I can maistly say it off by heart, but Miss Heriot will like to see it, and I might forget something. Eh, I'm a happy woman! The captain o' the 'William and Mary's' dead out yonder (pointing her thumb over her shoulder, which was the way or indicating distance in Comlie), and Willie's to bring the boat home. It's as good as a ship to him, for ance a captain aye a captain, and his owners are no the men to put him back in a mate's place."

"I am very glad to hear of Willie's promotion," said Marjory; "was the captain a Comlie man?"

"Eh, you'll think me awfu' hard-hearted," said Mrs. Patterson, struck with compunction, and pausing with her large horn spectacles in her hand; "but you canna suppose I would have spoke as free and been as thankfu' if he had been a Comlie man. Na, na, if another house in the town had been mourning I would have held my peace. I've had trouble enough myself to have mair feeling; but he's no frae Comlie nor nearhand. He's a Dundee man, and I ken naething about him. His name was Brown, like mony mair, and he's no even married that I ever heard tell of, and it's to be hoped he's in a better place."

With this the new captain's mother dismissed the old one, and put on her big spectacles. "It's dated Riga, the fourteenth February, for that's the port where they were bound. 'My dear mother, I hope you and Jenny's in good health as this leaves me. Many and many a time I think of you and the cosy little room, and the

flower, and the canary-bird—' Bless the laddie," said Mrs. Patterson, stopping abruptly, "he had aye the kindest heart!"

The reader probably, however, will not be so much interested in this letter as Marjory was, who listened and made her comments with thorough sympathy, feeling quite relieved, as was Willie's mother, by the fact that the dead captain was not a Comlie man. Dundee was large and vague, and far away, and was able enough to mourn her own dead. But as they went down the stairs after their visit was over, Marjory said to her little sister, "We shall be too late for luncheon at home; are you hungry, dear? I think we might go and dine with Aunt Jean."

"I am a little hungry," Milly confessed, not without a blush.

"Then run and tell Betty we are coming, and I will go on to the Manse; you can come after me or stay at Aunt Jean's, as you like."

"Walk slow, May, and I will make up to you," cried little Milly, who ran off instantly like a gleam of sunshine, her long fair hair fluttering in the breeze, anxious to be absent as short a

time as possible from her sister's side. Marjory went on slowly making her royal progress through her dominions, casting a smile now and then through the low windows on the ground floor, stopping to nod and say a passing word to some one on an outside stair. The doctor, setting out in his gig on some distant visit, jumped down and crossed the street to speak to her, to ask for Mr. Heriot and Mr. Charles, and tell her how his patients were, of many of whom she had a secondary charge, if not as consulting physician, yet with a responsibility almost as great. "James Tod, poor lad, would be the better of some books," the doctor said, "and you're a better deceiver than I am, Miss Heriot; you might persuade old Mrs. Little that your father has some rare wine in his cellar, wine she could not get to buy."

"You pay me a charming compliment," said Marjory. "Could you not cheat her yourself with all your powers?"

"She laughed in my face," said the doctor, who was young, and not very rich, "and asked me how I could get finer wines than other folk?

She was sure I might spend my siller better. And poor little Agnes dying before my eyes !"

"Will she die?"

"Don't ask me," said the too tender-hearted doctor, springing into his gig again. He was too sensitive to be a doctor, his wife said. As the gig drove away, some one else came up taking off his hat with profound respect. This was young Mr. Hepburn who lived in the house with the iron gates, and was the only unemployed person in Comlie. He was a young man tolerably well off, and more than tolerably good-looking, who had been brought up in a desultory way, was more accomplished than any other individual within twenty miles, did not in the least know what to do with himself, and was treated by Marjory with mingled kindness and condescension, as a clever schoolboy is sometimes treated by a young lady. For his part, Hepburn admired Marjory as he had never admired anyone else in his life. He was three or four years her junior, and he thought he was in love with, nay, adored her. The sight of her he said was as sunshine in the dreary silent place; and he had

said this so often that it had come to Marjory's ears. It was not very original, and she had thought it impertinent, and treated him with more lofty condescension than ever.

"Oh, Mr. Hepburn," she said holding out her hand to him; "I did not know you were here. Some one told me you had gone abroad. I should have asked you to come to us sometimes at Pitcomlie, and bring your music, had I known. Not that we are very lively—"

"Pitcomlie is a great deal better than lively," said the young man. "I am not of such a frivolous mind as to be always looking for amusement. You know, Miss Heriot, how glad I am always to be there."

"But amusement is a very good thing," said Marjory. "Indeed, it is bad for young people to be without it. When Milly is a little older, I intend to make papa give balls and be very lively. I have always thought it a most essential part of training. I hope you go on with your music, and practice as much as you used to do?"

"I don't practice at all in the ordinary sense of the word," said young Hepburn, with an annoy-

ance he could not conceal. Marjory had Scotch prejudices and many old-fashioned notions, and it was her conviction that a man with an immortal soul who "practised" three or four hours a day was a phenomenon to be looked on with something like contempt. Girls did it, poor things! not being able to help themselves—but a man! This young woman, though she thought herself enlightened, was a tissue of prejudices, and we do not in the least defend her old world ways of thinking. She sang very sweetly herself, with a voice which was very flexible and true, but only moderately cultivated; and she thought of music as a pleasant thing to fill up stray corners, but not as an inspiration or occupation of life. And when she kindly asked Mr. Hepburn to come and *bring his music*, what she meant was undoubtedly contempt.

"I don't mean to use any word I ought not to use," said Marjory, with her gracious smile, "but I hope you keep it up, that and your drawing. It is good to have such resources when one has only a quiet life to look forward to. Of course a gentleman has many ways of occupying himself; but

I am so sorry my education has been neglected. When I am dull, there is scarcely anything I can do but read."

"I should not think you were ever dull," said Hepburn, with adoring looks.

"Not very often, just now; but some time probably I shall be, and then I shall envy you your resources. Will you dine with us at Pitcomlie to-morrow, Mr. Hepburn? I fear we shall be quite alone; but if you will take the trouble to come—and bring your—"

"I will come with the greatest pleasure," said the young man, precipitately, drowning that last objectionable request. He would take no music, he vowed, for any inducement which might be offered him. His right hand would make an effort to forget its cunning. He would give himself up to riding and shooting, and trudge about the ploughed fields in leather gaiters, like her father, and make a boor of himself, by way of proving to her that he was not a schoolboy nor a dilettante. This he vowed to himself as she went on smiling, and little Milly passed him like a gleam of light, rushing after her sister. How

unlike these two were to anything else far or near! Marjory, with her little sister, was like a deep-hearted rose, not full blown, yet perfect—one of those roses which you can look down into, as into a lovely nest of colour and fragrance—with a tiny little bud just showing the pink on the same stem. Young Hepburn had a great deal of superficial poetry about him, and this was the image which came into his mind. Not full blown—keeping the form of a bud, deep, many-folded, odorous as the very soul of Summer. That was the similitude which best expressed Marjory Heriot to his mind.

And she, laughing softly at him, wondering to herself what God could mean by making such men, deciding within herself that he would have made a nice sort of girl, pleasant and rather loveable, went on to the Manse, which indeed had been her destination all along.

CHAPTER III.

THE minister of Comlie was an old man who had held that appointment for a great many years. In many respects he was like a traditional Scotch minister, but in others he did not come up to that ideal. He had baptized the entire body of his parishioners, and married a great many of them, but he was not the genial, kindly old soul who is ordinarily conceived of as filling that position. When he walked through the town the children did not run after him, nor seek sweetmeats in his pockets. Any boy or girl in Comlie who had entertained that fond delusion would have been fixed to the earth by the Doctor's frown, and repented, all his or her life after, the profane thought and word. Dr. Murray was a

man addicted to literature, full of Biblical criticism, great in exegesis—a man who had been Moderator of the Assembly, and thus reached the highest honour of which the incumbent of a Scottish parish is capable. After this a great calm in respect to distinctions and worldly advantages had been visible in him—he had contemned them gently with a benevolent superiority. His spirit had been, as indeed it ought to have been, in a professional point of view, rather that of Solomon than of Alexander; no new world to conquer had occupied his thoughts, but only a sense of that completion and fulness which must always be more or less sad. The thing that hath been is that which shall be, he said. He had everything the world could give him, and now there was no more to wish for. But this sense of having attained the highest honour that earth could afford, if somewhat depressing, had also a great deal of satisfaction in it. No doubt his career was over, and all its splendour and majesties were among the things that had been; but yet he had the profound and tranquillizing conviction that he had not lived in vain. Not in any

way had he lived in vain. He had written the article on Hyssop in the Encyclopædia Britannica, and he had had a large share in the Popular Commentary on the Bible, which was considered the very best authority upon Eastern customs and geography, and the local peculiarities which throw light upon the sacred text. His name was one of those which had been connected from the very first with the 'Christian Herald,' and it was he who wrote all the articles, signed Alpha, in that well-conducted magazine. Therefore it will be at once perceived that his life had been well worth living, that he was not in any respect an unsuccessful man, and that the evening of his days might well breathe forth a certain gentle satisfaction. Comlie was very proud of the doctor, and even Fife was proud of him. When he heard that Marjory was in the drawing-room, he laid down the book he was reading and put a marker in it, and after five minutes or so had elapsed—for it did not suit his dignity to make any hasty movements—he left his library to see the young lady whom he felt a great interest in, as he always said. "She has too much imagination

and a hasty mind that runs away with her sometimes; but she has fine instincts," he would say. The Manse stood on a knoll, and the drawing-room faced the sea. It was an old-fashioned room, with small windows set in the deep walls, and furniture which was somewhat dark and solemn. "You'll stay and take a bit of dinner with us, May, now you're here," Mrs. Murray was saying as the doctor came in. "It's no often we get a sight of you, and there's nobody the Minister likes so well to see. Milly, my dear, take off your hat, and tell Margaret, the table-maid, to get out some of the apple-puffs you're aye so fond of. Marjory likes them too."

"But, dear Mrs. Murray, we are going to Aunt Jean," said Marjory. "I will come back another day. Now the weather is mending, I shall be often in Comlie. We are all very well, Doctor, thank you, but wondering not to see you. Uncle Charles has some great argument, which, he says, he keeps in his pocket ready for you. I don't know what it is about. I thought perhaps you would come up quietly to dinner to-morrow, and then you could have it out?"

"We'll do that, my dear," said Mrs. Murray briskly; but the doctor was more formal in his ways.

"Mr. Charles is no contemptible antagonist," he said; "it will be our old question about mortifications. I know I am on the unpopular side, but a man who has convictions must make up his mind to that sometimes. Did you say to-morrow? I do not remember what engagements I have, but if Mrs. Murray says so——"

"Hoots, doctor, you've no engagements," said lively little Mrs. Murray; "you forget you're at home in Comlie, and no in Edinburgh, where, to my tribulation, we go out to our dinner every night. You may laugh, but it's no laughing matter, May, my dear, and a destruction to my best gown—no to say to all my habits. You may wear point lace when it's dirty, but point lace is too good for a poor Minister's wife, and my suit of Mechlin is as black as if I had swept the chimney in it; and as for working a stocking, or doing any rational thing after one of their late dinners! But we'll come to you, my dear."

"I am afraid we are going to have a storm,"

said the doctor; "the wind is blowing strong up the Firth, and I doubt we'll have a dirty night. Nothing will teach these fishers to be careful when they're getting what they think a good haul. I have a great mind, when I see the glass falling and the wind rising, to send old Tammas to ring the church bells and warn their boats."

"And why not do it?" said Marjory, with a slight start which was peculiar to her when she heard anything that roused her interest. "There could not be a better use for church bells. Do it, doctor! If the men knew, it might save some of these poor fellows. Poor Jamie Horsburgh, for instance; I saw Jean to-day, and it almost broke my heart."

"Her that was laundry-maid at Pitcomlie?" said Mrs. Murray. "Ah, poor thing! and what she is to do to gain her bread with that bit infant of hers? But I do not advise you, doctor, to set any new-fangled plan agoing for ringing the bells. Nobody would pay any attention. They would say: 'What does the minister know about the weather? Let him bide at his books, and leave the winds to us.' That's what they would say.

And if you take my opinion, I cannot but think they would have justice on their side."

"I will not risk it, my dear," said the doctor; "they are a pig-headed race, like all the partially educated. I wish there was a higher standard of education in our schools. Reading and writing are very well, but a little attention to the common phenomena of the elements would be a great matter—as I said to Mr. Tom the last time he was here—"

"Speaking of your brother Tom," said Mrs. Murray briskly; "what is this I hear about Charlie? A second boy, and him not above two years and a-half married! My certy, but they're losing no time; and I hope both doing well?"

"Oh yes," said Marjory, with a shade of indifference stealing over her face; "people always do well in those circumstances, don't they? Fancy our Charlie with a family of children about him! I think it spoils a young man. It makes them grandfatherly—not to say grandmotherly—and knowing about domestic matters. Charlie, of all people in the world! but it cannot be helped, or put a stop to, I suppose?"

"Whisht, my dear, whisht; that's a strange thing for a woman to say."

"Is it?" said Marjory, with a sudden blush. "What I meant was that the thought of Charlie turned into an old wife—Charlie knowing all about nurseries, and what to give a baby when it has a cold—is so very queer. I don't like it; Charlie was always my pet brother. Poor fellow! and he so far away!"

"I have no doubt he's very happy—as he ought to be with a nice wife and two bonnie bairns," said Mrs. Murray, a little annoyed at Marjory's anti-matrimonial views; but this remark passed unnoticed in the doctor's question about what she was reading, which changed the character of the conversation. Mrs. Murray was not booky, as she herself said; she was too old for anything but novels; and though she had great enjoyment of these on a wet afternoon, by the fireside, or when the doctor was busy with his sermon, she did not say much about them, and kept them in the background with a certain sense of weakness. Marjory, on the contrary, discussed her reading with some eagerness, while the old lady and little Milly

cooed and whispered to each other in the background; the child's fair hair pressed lovingly against the net border—white and softly plaited—of Mrs. Murray's cap. And so long was the discussion carried on that Marjory at last sprang up suddenly and held out her hand in alarm to take leave, when the bell rang for the early dinner, which reminded her how time was passing.

"Aunt Jean will be waiting for us," she cried, with a compunction which was quickened by the well-known tradition of punctuality which distinguished the Hay-Heriots.

"Well, well, my dear, it will do her no harm for once," said Mrs. Murray, going to the door with the visitors, and opening it for them with her own hands. She came out to the step to see them on their way, while her husband stood behind. "Be sure you don't sit too long with Miss Jean—for there's a storm coming up, as the doctor says; and come soon back again," said the old lady, smiling and waving her hand, while her cap-strings wantoned in front of her in the rising wind. "That lassie has strange notions," she said, as she came in and shut the door. "I

wish I saw her with a good man and bairns of her own."

"She's a fine girl," said the doctor, turning along the passage to his dressing-room, to wash his hands before dinner. These words did not at all resemble in sense the other expression of applause, "a fine woman"—which they resemble in sound. Dr. Murray did not mean to imply that he found May "fine" in physical development—*belle femme*, as the French say, with a similar signification. He meant that she was delightful, charming, the best specimen he knew of everything a young woman should be.

We are obliged to confess, however, that it was with a somewhat undignified precipitation that the two sisters crossed the wide street to the dwelling-place of their old aunt. Miss Jean Hay-Heriot was grand-aunt to the younger generation. Her father, the Laird of Pitcomlie, was grandfather of the present Laird: but as she had been the youngest of her family, she was scarcely ten years older than her nephew. She had lived in this gabled house for five and forty years, since the time when, still a young woman, she had

given up the world in disgust, after five or six years of wandering in places where lone ladies resort to—Bath, and Cheltenham, and Harrowgate—for in those days it had not become the custom to go abroad. Five and forty years! What a waste of time to look back upon, and what a monotonous, unfeatured expanse, May thought, who sometimes pondered over her old aunt's fate as one chapter among many of the phenomena of feminine existence. But to Miss Jean this waste of years was not so unfeatured as to her young relative. There seemed no reason why she should not go on for ever in the same active yet tranquil way. From her window in the gable she superintended all that Comlie did, every stranger who came into it (they were not many), all the mild visiting that took place among the higher classes, and the family movements of the lower, quarrels, flirtations, marriages, catastrophes of all kinds. She was seated in this same window, when Marjory, a little flushed with haste, hurriedly gathering up her riding-habit, and finding it much in the way, became visible running over from the Manse, Milly close

behind, with her long hair streaming. Miss Jean quietly smiled to herself, and prepared for tempest. It roused her up sometimes, and gave her a pleasant exhilaration, to get an opportunity of setting "that girl of Thomas's" right.

"Quick, quick, Miss Marjory," said Betty, at the door. The door was in the gable, and opened into a square hall, which was underneath the drawing-room. "Quick, like good bairns, and dinna keep your aunty waiting. The broth's ready to come up, and Jessie making a terrible fyke in the kitchen—and Miss Jean's no pleased."

She threw open the door of a little bedroom at the end of the passage as she spoke—it was thought convenient in that region to have sleeping rooms on the ground-floor—and began instantly to take off Milly's outer jacket, which was worn over her long riding-skirt. May smoothed her own hair with a trepidation which was quite unusual to her. It was bright brown hair, not so blond as Milly's, but still full of soft colour, though not red, nor even golden. Her eyes were brown too, large and serious, but capable of light-

ing up with searching golden gleams. She was softly coloured in every way, with an evanescent bloom that came and went, and the most changeable of faces. Sometimes strangers thought her almost plain, when her upper lip fixed on her lower with the resolute look she sometimes had, and her eyes looked straight before her full of silent thought. But most people who knew Marjory held it impossible that she could ever be plain. She smoothed her hair as best she could, in her hurry, for those were the days when young ladies were expected to have smooth and shining hair—and put her tall hat and her riding gloves on the table, and pulled out her handkerchief from her bodice. "Am I tidy, Betty; shall I do?" asked, with tremulous accents, the young woman who half an hour before had felt herself princess of Comlie. All these pleasant pretensions failed before the tribunal of Miss Jean.

"Oh, ay, Miss Marjory, you'll do," cried anxious Betty; and attended as ever closely by her little sister, Marjory ran upstairs. Miss Jean sat in the end window, her favourite seat of inspection—and all her "borders," which were of blonde, not so

closely put together as those of Mrs. Murray, were quivering round her old face. "So you've come at last, Miss May," she said. "It's a great honour to my humble house, and folk that are gratified with the visits of their betters must be content to wait."

"Oh, Aunt Jean, I am very sorry! We ought to have come here at once, instead of going to the Manse—"

"Far be it from me to say what a young lady like you should do. I'm nothing but an old-fashioned person myself. In my days the young were brought up to obedience and consideration of other folks' ways. But I'm not a learned man like the doctor, nor a whillie-wha like the doctor's wife. I'm of the old Hay-Heriot stock, that always spoke their mind. Betty, bring ben the broth—if our young ladies can sup broth. They tell me my nephew Charlie has brought a grand cook to the house, far above our old-fashioned Scots dishes."

"Indeed, Aunt Jean, it is the old dishes she is famous for," said May, very conciliatory. "She says she knows nothing about kickshaws, and one

of the things I specially wanted was to ask you for the old family receipt for shortbread, which you always promised me, and your particular fish and sauce, which Uncle Charles says is the best he ever tasted."

"I suppose you think you can win me over with your nonsense about fish and sauce," said Miss Jean. "Set Charlie up with his cooks and his newfangled ways! In my days a man ate what was set before him, and said his grace, and was thankful. The mistress of a house, with all her family to provide for, might be excused for giving her mind to it; but, ugh! a man studying what he's to put into his vile stomach! If there's a thing I cannot abide— Dinner's ready! You need not tell me that; it's been ready any time this twenty minutes. You may say to Jess I'm truly sorry for her, but it's our young ladies' way. Go first, bairn, and go quick, for I'll not wait another moment, if it was for the Queen herself."

Thus adjured, Milly ran downstairs, followed by her sister. The old lady brought up the rear, with her big cane. She was a little old woman over

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seventy, in a large cap with many ribbons and borders of broad blonde, which waved about her withered face as she moved. It was a small face, much shrivelled up, but lighted with two blazing sparks of light, deeply sunk within the eaves and folds of her eyelids—eyes which could see what happened a mile off, and burn through and through any unfortunate who was subjected to their gaze. She wore a red China crape shawl, very old, but once very richly embroidered and handsome, on her thin shoulders, and her short footstep and the tap of her cane rang through the house as she moved. Everybody within her range increased their exertions, and moved with doubled activity when the tap of Miss Jean's cane became audible.

As for Milly, running on before, her aunt was to her as the exacting, but, on the whole, benevolent fairy who appears in all the tales, who scolded Cinderella, yet gave her the pumpkin coach, and who had drawers upon drawers full of shreds and patches, strings of beads, bright bits of silk, everything that was necessary for the dressing of dolls and making of needlebooks. The pat-pat of the cane seemed part of the old lady to Milly's

ear, and she was by no means sure that the cane was not a third leg upon which Aunt Jean moved as ordinary mortals did on the more usual complement. No one except Miss Jean said a word as they sat down to table, and Betty, with a speed and noiselessness, which were born at once of terror and of long practice, served the broth. Milly said they were very good, and asked for a little more of them, without any perception that she was ungrammatical, and as they were hot and savoury Miss Jean mollified by degrees.

"There's one good thing," she said, "that you cannot spoil broth by waiting. That and porridge should always be well boiled. I hope your grand cook knows that among her other accomplishments. But, maybe Milly is above porridge, though her father was brought up upon them, and his father before him, and all the best Scots gentry from the days of Robert Bruce."

"I have a few porridge in a saucer every morning," said Milly, proudly, "and May gives me the rest of the cream after papa's last cup of tea."

"A few in a saucer!" Miss Jean retorted, with renewed vehemence. (N.B. The Scotch reader

does not need to be informed that porridge is plural as well as broth.) "I hope, Marjory Hay-Heriot, that you may never have to give a severe account of the way you've brought up that motherless bairn."

"Cream is not immoral, I hope, aunty?" said Marjory, with rising spirit.

"Immoral! Luxury's immoral, indulgence is immoral, and they're immoral that say a word to the contrary," cried the old lady. "Will you tell me that to bring up a fellow-creature to self-indulgence is no a sinful act? But I never understood the ways of this generation, nor do I want to understand them. You're all alike—all alike! from Tom's horse-racing to Milly's saucer of parritch—it is the same thing over again. What you please! and not what's your duty, and the best thing for you in this world and the next. Betty, the boiled beef is too plain for these young ladies. Bring it to me, and put the chicken before Miss Marjory. A queen may eat a bit of chicken, but the boiled beef's aye good enough for me."

The fact was that the chicken had been

added to the meal, expressly for the benefit of Marjory and Milly.

"Bairns are brought up different to what they were in my time," Miss Jean had said to her cook, benevolently, an hour before. "That chucky's young and tender, and they'll like it better than the beef."

But all this kindness had been turned to gall by the unfortunate delay. Milly took this as a simple necessity of nature—rustled a little in her chair, and ate her chicken; but Marjory resented the ungracious reception.

"I am sorry we have come to trouble you, aunt," she said. "I would rather not have anything, thank you; I'm not hungry. The wind is cold, and it has given me a headache. If I might go and sit quiet in the drawing-room, while you finish your dinner, I should get well again."

"The thing for a headache is to eat a meal," said Miss Jean, alarmed. "Bring me the chicken, Betty, till I cut Miss Marjory a bit of the breast. You cannot carve; that's why you want to go away. In my day, carving was part of a lady's

education—and cooking too, for that matter. My own mother, as good a woman as ever stepped, took lessons from Mrs. Glass in Edinburgh. I had not that advantage myself, but I know how to divide a chicken. And, Betty, bring in the apple-tart. We'll all go up to the drawing-room by-and-bye, and before ye go ye shall have a cup of tea."

Thus the storm fell a little, but still continued to growl at intervals; however, when the dinner was over, and May took her place in the square gable, her headache—if she had one—had disappeared. Miss Jean's drawing-room was a curious room, stretching the whole width of the house, and wider at the back than at the other end. The narrower part was the gable. It had an end window looking out upon the street, and one on the east side, from which you could see the line of reddish rocks rounding off towards the point on which stood Pitcomlie; the white mansion-house of the present day shining in the sunshine; the old house, with its high, peaked roof and half-ruined tourelles standing up on the top of the cliff hard by, and the sea breaking in a white

line underneath upon the rocks. Though she professed no sentiment, that window which commanded Pitcomlie was dear to Miss Jean's heart.

On the south side of the room was another window, looking straight out upon the sea, from which you could see far off the dim lion couchant of Arthur's Seat, and sometimes a ghostly vision of the Calton Hill, with its pillars, and all kinds of cloudy pageants and phantasmagoria of the elements. It was a grand view, Miss Jean allowed; but she preferred the gable window looking down upon the High Street of Comlie; and here, too, Marjory betook herself instinctively. The Firth, with its splendours, was at her command any day, but so was not this little centre of humanity. That curiosity about her neighbours and their doings, which was sharp and bitter in Miss Jean, had a warmer development in Marjory, who was young, and thought well of humanity in general; but probably it was the same sentiment. She placed herself on the old-fashioned window-seat, and looked out while she answered all the old lady's questions.

Comlie High Street was very quiet, especially at this tranquil after-dinner hour, when the little world rested after its meal. The children had returned to the school, and such men as had any business to do had gone back to it till the evening. Marjory watched young Hepburn walking up and down slowly, something between a spy and a sentinel, keeping watch, as she very well knew, for her own re-appearance. She smiled with a certain gentle contempt as she watched him, moving slowly across the unbroken light in the still street. What odd fancies boys take into their heads! What good could it do him to wait for her?

When Hepburn disappeared, another figure became visible coming the other way—a man with a clump of his own shadow about his feet, which gradually disengaged itself as he "came east," and stalked along by his side in a portentous lengthened line. The changes of this shadow diverted her as she sat talking to Aunt Jean. "Yes, there had been another letter about Charlie's second baby—a note from Mrs. Charles herself—well, no, not a very nice letter—a con-

sequential little personage, I think, aunty; as proud of her baby as if it was any virtue of hers." And here Marjory gave a little laugh, not at Mrs. Charles, but at the dark shadow of the man approaching, which lay along the causeway, and moved so, as if it pushed itself along, lying on its side. After she had laughed, Marjory, half ashamed of herself, looked at the man, and saw he was one of the porters from the nearest railway station, and then that he was approaching the house. She raised herself up with a little thrill of—something—yes, surprise, and more than surprise—though probably it was only some parcel for Aunt Jean arrived by the railway, which was ten miles off. By the time he had reached the door, and had knocked heavily with his hand, May was sure that it was a parcel for her aunt, but nevertheless was aware of a little fluttering at her heart.

"Do you often get things by the railway, aunty?" she asked.

"Me get things by the railway? You forget I'm a lone old woman, and no acquainted with all your new-fangled ways. Not me. When I want

anything not to be had in Comlie, which is not often, it comes in the boat to Anstruther, as was always our way, and then by the road, or private hand when there's an opportunity. Railway! said she? —What's a' this, Betty? — what's a' this? A letter? Give it to me, you taupie, and make no fuss. Oh! for Miss Marjory! My certy! Miss Marjory's in great request when her letters come following her here."

"Eh, Miss Jean! it's what they call a telegraph—it's come from the railway at Kinnucher, wi' a man and horse. Eh, I'm awfu' feared it's ill news!"

A telegram is always alarming to those who are unfamiliar with such startling messages; and even in these accustomed days there are few women who open one without a tremor. But at the time of which we write, they were unusual and inevitably meant something tragical. Betty stood gaping with excitement and terror, looking on, and Miss Jean let her knitting drop on her knee, and turned her sharp eyes towards her niece, while little Milly, pressing close to her sister, interposed her blond head almost between

Marjory and the brief, fated letter. Somehow, as she read it, she felt in the suddenness of the shock a conviction that she had known it all along, mingled with a curious confused self-reproach for the levity of her thoughts about that man's shadow. She read it, and her head seemed to buzz and shoot as if a hundred wheels had started into motion, and then stood still. She looked round at her aunt, as if across a sudden distance at once of time and of space; all the colour fled from her cheeks, and her voice changed like her feelings. "Tom has had a bad accident," she said.

"God bless us! Marjory, you're trying to break it to me quietly; the boy's dead."

"No!" said Marjory, with a slight shiver. "A bad accident; read it, aunty. And, Milly, run quick and get on your things."

Miss Jean, sobered too in a moment, took the terrible missive, which, to her ignorant eyes, looked something diabolical. It was from somebody in England she made out, and was worded with what she felt to be cruel conciseness. "Tom has had a bad accident; thrown from his horse.

symptoms dangerous. He wishes you to tell his father; and to come to him at once."

"It may be a lie," said Miss Jean in a low voice, and trembling; "very likely it's a lie. There's no beginning and no ending; and the man, if it is a man, has not signed his name."

"Oh, I know his name; he is one of Tom's friends. It is no lie!" said Marjory. And then she added, trembling too: "Aunt Jean, don't you feel, like me, that you always knew this would be the end?"

"The end! Who's speaking of the end?" cried Miss Jean impatiently; and then, all at once, she fell crying and sobbing. "Oh, poor Thomas, poor Thomas; that was so very proud of his boy! Who's to tell him?"

"Will I run for the Minister?" said Betty, who had come back with Marjory's hat in her hand, the tears streaming down her cheeks, and all the excitement of a great family event in her mind.

"The Minister is the right person to tell the father such ill news," said Miss Jean; "and it's best to have him at hand, whatever happens. Betty, you can run—"

Marjory put up her hand to stop the eager messenger. In spite of herself, even at that moment of excitement, a vision of Dr. Murray clearing his throat, and preparing his way by a little speech about the vicissitudes of life gleamed before her. She could see him hemming and taking out his handkerchief with a look as tragically important as if he were the chief actor in the scene.

"No!" she said; "not the Minister; send down to John Horsburgh's to get out our horses, Betty. I will tell him myself."

"You're not equal to it, my poor bairn."

"He will take it best from me; and it's Tom's wish," said Marjory, putting on her hat. She felt the tears rising to her eyes; but this was not a moment to let them fall.

"I doubt if Thomas will take it as he ought to take it," said Miss Jean; "he's a good man, but he's always had his own way. Perhaps, as you say, Marjory, it is best to keep it all in the family, for a man's apt to say what he should not say in a sudden trouble. And I'm sorry I was so ill to you about keeping me waiting; what was ten

minutes, here or there? Oh May, my bonnie lamb! the eldest son!"

And with this Miss Jean, melted by the bad news into use of the pet name which had scarcely passed her lips since Marjory was a child, gave her niece a sudden embrace, by putting her thin hands on May's two arms, and touching her chin with her own withered cheek. Very seldom was she moved to such an outburst of affection. The wave of her blonde borders across Marjory's face was the most passionate demonstration she was capable of; but when her nieces had gone, Miss Jean sat down at the window which looked to Pitcomlie, with a genuine ache in her old heart. "Eh, the bonnie laddie he was!" she said to herself; "eh, the stout and strong young man! There never was an heir cut off that I mind of in our family before. But Thomas was aye foolish, very foolish; and many a time I've told him what indulgence would come to. Lord help us all, both living and dying! It's aye a special blessing of Providence, whatever happens, that Marjory's a courageous creature; and that Charlie's babies are both sons."

Thus the old woman comforted herself, who was near the ending of all mortal vicissitude; and Pitcomlie lay fair and calm in the sun, greatly indifferent who might come or go—one or another, what did it matter to the old house, which had outlasted so many generations? what did it matter to the calm world, which takes all individual sorrows so easily? But to some atoms of humanity what a difference it made! How dark the heavens had grown all at once, and how clouded the sun!

Marjory said not a word all the way home, as she rode with her little sister by her side. How they had chattered as they came; and how Milly had called "May! May!" a dozen times in a minute; the prelude of every sentence. Milly kept as close to her sister now as she could, and sometimes stroked her skirt with her little hand and the whip in it, in token of silent sympathy. There was urgent need to reach home; but Marjory did not go fast. It was no easy task she had before her. Her father was fond of her she knew; perhaps more fond than of either of his sons; but his heir, with all his extravagances, with all his

folly and wildness, had been his delight and pride. There are some women who are saved from all the shocks and pains of life; everyone around them instinctively standing forth to protect them, and shield off the blow; but there are some, on the other hand, to whom it comes natural to receive the sharpest and first thrusts of adversity, and blunt the spear in their own bosoms before it penetrates any other. Marjory was one of this class,—a class instantly recognized and put to use by the instinct of humanity. It had seemed natural to Tom to put this duty upon her; natural to Tom's friend to communicate it to her, without any attempt at breaking the news. And she herself accepted her office, simply, feeling it natural too.

CHAPTER IV.

THE house of Pitcomlie lay very still and quiet in the fitful sunshine, when the daughters of the family reached its open door. The door stood always open, unsuspicious, disclosing the way into its most private corners to any comers. It had nothing to conceal. At this hour in the afternoon, it was exceptionally still. The gentlemen were out, the servants all absorbed into their own part of the house, and not a stir nor sound announced the presence of a large household. The brightness of the day was clouded, but yet held its own by moments, the sun coming out now and then with double brilliancy from the edge of the clouds which were driven over its face one by one. As Marjory and her little sister

rode up the avenue, one of those great masses of cloud had floated up, and threw a heavy shadow over the house, and the blue broad sea beyond; but as they alighted at the door, the sun burst forth again, blazing upon the wide open doorway.

"Is my father at home, Rob?" asked Marjory of the groom who came to take her horse.

"The laird's out, ma'am, and so's Mr. Charles. They're baith away wast," said Rob, jerking his thumb over his shoulder.

Marjory stood musing on the steps before she would go in; she did not know whether to seek her father "away wast," or to wait for him. How still the house was, so unsuspecting, so serene and peaceful! It seemed treacherous to go into it with a secret so deeply affecting its existence in her hands. Somehow it seemed to Marjory's excited fancy that she was about to give a blow without warning, without preparation, to some one whose smiling unalarmed countenance looked trustfully up at her. It seemed a treachery even to know it, and above all to go on knowing it, keeping the secret, into the old gentle family house that feared

nothing. When she went upstairs she changed her dress, and gave her maid instructions to pack a few necessaries for her.

"My brother has met with an accident," she said, as calmly as she could.

To say it even in this form relieved her mind. She did not feel such a traitor to the kindly old house.

Mr. Heriot fortunately came back as soon as her preparations were made, and now the worst part of her duty was to come. She ran down and met him at the door.

"What made you so late, May?" he said, his face brightening involuntarily at sight of her.

"I was detained," she said; and came out and loitered in front of the door, playing with the dogs, who always accompanied him. He was as unsuspicious as his house. If he had been anxious in the morning, he had thrown his anxieties off. He pointed out to his daughter the good points of a pointer puppy, which, large-limbed and imbecile, came roving round from the stables, scenting the arrival of the others.

"He'll make a grand dog before September," he said, "when he's grown and trained. Tom will be delighted with him."

May interrupted him hastily, for she was choking with the news.

"Come round to the cliff, papa, there is a storm brewing," she said.

Unsuspicious, he went with her. They took what Mr. Heriot called "a turn" round the soft lawn which surrounded that side of the house. It was too much exposed for flowers or even shrubs, but green and smooth as velvet. The sea dashed with a muttering suppressed roar on the beach beneath. It was of a steely blue, sometimes flashing in the gleams of sunshine, sometimes leaden under the shadow. Towards the east, on the very angle of the coast, stood the old mansion house, tall and narrow, with its tourelles—all but one tower, which adjoined the present house, was ruinous and roofless—but it was draped by branches which burst out from the broken walls, and a wild luxuriance of ivy. The existing house stood lower, and looked warm, and peaceful, and safe, like the present under the protection of the past.

Marjory and her father made their turn round and round, she talking against time, not knowing how to introduce her subject. At last, as they turned to come back, she pointed out to him one of those sudden dramatic changes of the clouds.

"Look, papa, how quickly the lights change. It was in sunshine just now, and how black everything is already! It makes one feel eerie. It is like a cloud of misfortune enveloping the old house."

She was foolishly in hopes that he would have taken up this metaphorical strain, and thus given her an opening to say what she had to say.

"Nothing more natural, my dear," said Mr. Heriot. "The clouds are driving up from the mouth of the Firth. It's an ill sign when they come and go so fast. I hope those foolish fellows from Comlie shore will be warned in time."

"Oh, papa," cried Marjory, seizing this opening. "It is dreadful to think how seldom we are warned in time! How we go on to the very edge of a precipice, and then—"

"Phoo!" said Mr. Heriot, "if a man does not keep a look-out before him, it's nobody's fault but his own."

Thus the door was shut upon her again. She looked at him with a kind of despair, and put both her hands round his arm.

"Papa," she said, "I think we have had a very tolerably happy life—nothing very much to find fault with. Everything has gone on comfortably. We have had no great troubles, no misfortunes to speak of—"

"I don't know what you call misfortunes," said her father. "That affair of the Western Bank was anything but pleasant."

"It was only money, papa."

"Only money! What would you have, I should like to know? *Only* money! May, my dear, to be a sensible girl as you are, you sometimes speak very like a haverel. Loss of money is as great a misfortune as can befall a family. It brings a hundred other things in its train—loss of consideration, troubles of all kinds. Personal losses may hurt more for the moment, but so far as the family is concerned—"

"Oh, don't say so," cried Marjory. "Papa, I am afraid there are things that hurt a great deal more. I have heard—something about Tom—"

"What about Tom?" he said, turning upon her with an eagerness much unlike his former calm.

"It may not perhaps be so bad as appears. He has had—an accident," she said, breathless and terrified.

To her surprise, the anxiety in her father's face calmed down.

"An accident! is that all?" he said, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

"All! papa!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Heriot, half-impatiently, "you think I've no feeling. You are mistaken, May. But that boy, that brother of yours, has been in worse scrapes—scrapes that no doctor could mend. However, that's not the question. How did you hear? and when did it happen? and what is it? Arm, or leg, or collar-bone? I know how lads lame themselves. Hunting is all very well in moderation, but these young men pay dear for it. They think no more of breaking

a limb than if it was the branch of a rotten tree."

"But, papa, I am afraid it is, perhaps, more serious than you think," faltered Marjory, half rendered hopeful by his ease, half frightened by indifference.

"Never fear," said Mr. Heriot; "women always think worse of such things than they deserve. Tom's not the lad to come to harm that way. It's long or the de'il dee at a dykeside."

Then a moment of silence followed. She felt as if her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She was bewildered by her father's strange levity. She strolled round the cliff slowly, as if she were in a dream, not feeling sure for one dizzy moment whether her senses might not have deceived her, whether the telegram might not be some mere delusion and her father right. He was so confident and easy in his confidence—and surely on these kind of subjects, at least, he must know better than she did. But then, to be sure, it was not on her judgment the matter rested. It was Tom's friend who had communicated news which nobody's opinion could change; and al-

ready the lights were lengthening and the afternoon passing away.

"Papa, you will not mind my going to him," she said, hurriedly. "He wishes it; he has sent for me. And I wish very much to go at once."

"He has sent for you?"

"For all of us. He says, 'Tell my father—' I fear, I fear, he must be very bad. Oh! my poor Tom, my poor Tom!"

"You are talking nonsense," said her father, letting her hand drop from his arm with a certain impatience. "Tom might have known better than to make such an appeal to you. Where is he? And if he were so very bad how could he have written? Phoo, phoo, May; this fuss and nonsense is not like you."

"It is not my doing," she cried. "Oh! papa, look, the afternoon is flying away, and we shall lose the train."

He looked up at the sky as she did, and somehow this practical reference seemed to alarm him more than all she had said. In the bright, slanting sunshine which suddenly burst upon

him at this moment, his face paled as suddenly as if some evil breath had passed over it.

"The train! I did not think of that. You can order the carriage if you like," he said. "It is nonsense; but I will put some things into a bag, if I must be foolish and go with you on a fool's errand—"

"Your things are all ready, papa; I have seen to everything. If we do not miss the train—"

"I will go round to the stables myself," he said; and then he turned upon her with a forced smile. "Mind, I think it a fool's errand—a fool's errand; but to please you, May—"

Marjory stood motionless, as with a harsh little laugh he strode away from her. She could not have borne any more; but when Uncle Charles came suddenly round the corner of the old house, blown so suddenly round by the wind, which seemed to sway his long legs and slight, stooping figure, there burst from her, too, a little hysterical laugh, which somehow seemed to relieve her as tears might have done.

"What a wind!" said Mr. Charles. "You may laugh, but a slim person has hard ado to stand before it; and rising every moment, May. I should not like to be on the Firth to-night."

"I hope we shall get across," said May, eagerly, "before it is quite dark."

"Get across?" said Uncle Charles, in consternation. "Who is going to Edinburgh to-night?"

"Oh! Uncle Charles, my heart is breaking! Tom has had a terrible accident. Perhaps he is dying. We must go to him at once. And papa will not believe me; he will not understand how serious it is."

"God bless me!" said Mr. Charles. He made a few sudden steps towards the house, and then he came back. "My dear May, there's you to think of. What is it? I'll go myself."

"No, no, no," she said. "It was me he sent for. Oh, uncle, quick! bid them make haste with the carriage; we shall lose the train."

When the carriage came round to the door

ten minutes after, Mr. Charles put aside the two travelling bags which had been placed inside, and took his place opposite the father and daughter on the front seat.

"I'm coming too," he said.

Mr. Heriot gave vent to another strange little laugh.

"We had better have Milly in, and Mrs. Simpson, and all the rest," he cried; but he made no further remark or objection. His ruddy, rural countenance had paled somehow. It looked as Marjory had seen it after a period of confinement in town (town meant Edinburgh more than London to the Hay-Heriots, though sometimes they went to London too), when the sun-burnt brownness had worn off. He leant back in his corner and did not speak; he had not even asked where they were going. He seemed eager to keep up his appearance of indifference; but his heart had failed him. Mr. Charles, however, on the contrary, seemed to feel that all the amusement of the party depended upon him. He kept up a perpetual stream of talk, till the very sound of his voice made Marjory sick.

"We'll find him drinking beer, like the man in Thackeray's book," said Mr. Charles; "a ruffianly sort of hero in my way of thinking; but that's what you like, you young folk. We'll find him drinking beer, I'm saying, May, as well as ever he was. I think I can hear the great laugh he will give when he sees the whole procession of us coming in."

Mr. Heriot was nettled by his brother's interference, yet not disposed to depart from his own *rôle* of indifference.

"It's a fool's errand," he said; "but you may diminish the procession, Charles, if you like. It will be no procession, if there is only May and me."

Mr. Charles made no reply to this; he continued his cheerful talk.

"It's the penalty of all violent sports," he said; "even your cricket that such a fuss is made about. There's no risks of that kind with golf, now, for instance; and in my way of thinking, a far nobler game; but as for horses and hounds, they're simple destruction—in the first place to a man's living, and in the second to his bones."

"You never were great across country," said Mr. Heriot, satirically. "It was never one of the sins you were inclined to commit. That must be taken into account."

"And the consequence is I never had a broken limb," said Mr. Charles; "no surgeon has ever been needed for me; whereas the rest of you have spent, let us say three weeks in the year on an average, in your beds—"

With intervals, this kind of talk went on until the travellers had reached the edge of the stormy Firth, which spread like some huge boiling cauldron in black and white between them and the misty heights of Edinburgh. It was late twilight falling into night; but as there was a moon somewhere, the stormy landscape was held between light and dark in a pale visibleness which had something unearthly in it. Arthur's Seat appeared through the mist like a giant, with huge sullen shoulders turned upon them, and head averted. The boiling Firth was black and covered with foam.

While Marjory sat wrapping her cloak close round her in the most sheltered corner, her

uncle, with the fierce wind catching at his slim legs, came and leaned over her, and tried what he could, in gasps between the gusts of the storm, to keep up his consolatory remarks.

"This is nothing, Marjory, my dear; nothing to what it used to be," he said in snatches, blown about, now by the wind, now by the lurches of the steamer, "when we used to have to go, in a sailing-boat, from Kinghorn to Leith. This is nothing, nothing; I have seen the day—"

But here being driven first into her lap, and then forced to retreat violently backwards, in obedience to the next wave, Mr. Charles for the moment succumbed.

What a strange tragi-comedy it was! The boats from Comlie shore were out in that merciless storm, and the poor fisher-wives at their windows, or marching with bare feet on the sharp rocks, were looking out upon the struggles of their "men" to reach the harbour, which that wild suppressed light permitted them the additional misery of seeing. On the other

hand, far away in the peaceful inland depths of England, Tom Heriot was lying tragically gay with fever; sometimes delirious, shouting out all kinds of strange follies in the ear of his friend, who was no better than himself. While yet between the two the wind made a jest and plaything of Mr. Charles Heriot, seizing him by his legs and tossing him about as in a rough game of ball, taking the words out of his mouth, though they were words of wisdom, and dispersing his axioms to the merciless waves. Even Marjory could not but laugh as she wrapped herself closer in her cloak. She laughed, and then felt the sobs struggle upward choking into her throat.

Then came the long night journey, silent, yet loud, with the perpetual plunging and jarring of the railway, that strange, harsh, prosaic jar—which yet, to those who listen to it all through an anxious night as May did—is an awful sound. Ordinary wheels and hoofs make a very different impression on the mind; but there is something in the monotonous clang of a railway which sounds unearthly to an excited mind, thus

whirled through the darkness. How fast the colourless hedgerows, the dark spectres of trees, the black stretches of country fly past, with now and then a flitting phantasmagoria of lights from some town or village; and yet how slow, how lingering, how dreary are the minutes which tick themselves out one by one with a desperate persistence and steadiness! In the faint and uncertain lamplight the face of her father dozing uneasily in the corner opposite to her, seemed to Marjory so blanched and worn, that she could scarcely keep herself from watching him in alarm, to make sure that he was living and well. Uncle Charles was at the other end of the carriage, shifting his long legs uneasily, sometimes uttering a dismal groan as he awoke, with a twinge of cramp, to which he was subject. He had filled the carriage with newspapers and railway books, by way of amusing Marjory.

"I don't pretend that I can read myself by this unsteady light," he said; "but you're young, May, and they'll keep you from thinking."

Poor Marjory! it was her youth (she thought) which made her so capable of thinking, and kept

from her eyes the broken sleep which brought momentary rest to her companions. Thus passed the lingering weary night.

CHAPTER V.

After this long journey, to step out into the bright daylight of a March morning—cold, but sunshiny; and into the unfamiliar clean little streets of an English country-town, gave the most curious sensation to the travellers. Marjory stepped out of the carriage like one in a dream. The long sleepless night, the fatigue of the journey, the ache of anxiety in her mind, seemed to wrap a kind of painful mist about her, through which she saw vaguely the circumstances of the arrival, the unknown figures moving about, the strange houses—some still shuttered and closed up as for the night, while the cheerful stir of early morning had begun with others. Was it possible that all these unknown people had slept softly and soundly all that long night through; and

knew of nothing to pluck away their rest from them, or pull their life asunder? The simplest things startled this little weary group as they hurried along the quiet sunshiny street. A cheerful red and white maid-of-all-work opening the windows, looking out with fresh vacant face upon them as they passed, looked as if she must have something to tell them. And so did the milkman clashing with his pails; and the early errand-boy stopping in the midst of his whistle to contemplate the two tall old men—Mr. Heriot, with that strangely blanched hue struggling through his brownness—Mr. Charles long and thin, and shaky with fatigue.

"A clean little place; a clean little place!" the latter was saying encouragingly to Marjory, as if there was some faint consolation to be drawn from that fact. It was very unlike Comlie. Some of the houses were old, with peaked gables and lattice windows, but the line of flat brick buildings, such as the Scottish mind regards with disdain, with the cleanest of curtains and shutters, and tidy ugly orderliness, filled up the greater part of the street. The inn to which they were

bound had a projecting sign, upon which the sun shone—a white horse, which swung, and pranced, and creaked in the morning air, over the low deep gateway by which the house was approached. The travellers were met by a little blear-eyed ostler, who peered at them anxiously from under the shelter of his hand.

"For Mr. 'Eriot?" he said, putting up his disengaged hand to his forehead, by way of salutation.

"How is he?" cried Marjory, a sudden sickness coming over her; the sickness of suspense which is never so tremendous as when it is about to be satisfied.

The little ostler shrugged his shoulders, and shook his ragged, shaggy head.

"I don't know as he's worse nor better," he said. "Much the same, they tell me. He's in the hands o' them doctors, as is enough to kill twenty men. That's why I've come to meet ye, my lady and gentlemen. There's a bone-setter in this place as 'ud set him right in a jiffy; you take my word. He's a nice gentleman; he gave me ten bob jist for nothing at all. You make

'em send for Job Turner, my lady. I know him. That's your sort for broken bones. What am I doing, master? Party for Mr. 'Eriot! nothin' in the world but showing the lady the way."

The ostler's speech had been interrupted by the master of the hotel, who came to the door bowing solemnly, endeavouring to combine the usual smiling benignity with which he received new guests with the gravity befitting the occasion.

"Walk in, gentlemen," he said. "I think I may make bold to say that the news is good, so far as it goes. We've spent a pretty comfortable night, sir, on the whole—a pretty comfortable night. Perhaps the lady would like to rest a bit afore breakfast. Mr. Fanshawe, Sir, as is with Mr. 'Eriot, made sure as you'd come. Your rooms are all ready, and I hope as I'll be able to make you and the lady as comfortable—as comfortable as is to be expected under the circumstances."

"Cheer up, May," said Mr. Heriot. It was the first time he had spoken since their arrival. "I told you it would turn out a trifle. You see the boy's better already. Cheer up," said the old

man, faltering, and looking at her with glassy eyes. "We've had a fright, but, thank God, it's over. Cheer up, my bonny May!"

For Marjory, so far from cheering up, had sunk down on the first chair, altogether overcome by the suspense and the information, and the sense of still more sickening suspense until she should see with her own eyes and judge how it was.

Tom Heriot had been far from passing, as the landlord said, a comfortable night; but he had slept for some hours towards the morning, and had awoke feeling, as he said, better, and in high spirits.

"After all I'll cheat the doctors yet," he had said to his friend. "I am half sorry now you sent for May. It will frighten them all to death at home. Odd as it may seem to you, the old boy's fond of me in his way. And, by Jove, Fanshawe, I'll try if I can't make a change somehow, and be a comfort to him, and all that. Life's a queer sort of business after all," said the prodigal, raising his shoulders from the pillows, and supporting himself on his hands. "It isn't the straightforward thing a fellow thinks when he's

beginning. Have your swing, that's all very well —and God knows I've had mine, and done some things I can't undo; but when one goes in for having one's swing, one expects to have a steady time after, and settle to work and put all straight. Look here, Fanshawe—if I had died, as I thought I should last night! By Jove, to have nothing but your swing and end there, it isn't much, is it, for a man's life?"

"No, it isn't much," said his friend; "but don't get on thinking, Tom, it's bad for your back."

"I don't believe it's my back," said Tom; "it's my legs or something. I'm as light as a bird, all here." And he struck himself some playful blows across the chest. "When the doctor comes, you'll see he'll say there's a difference. Get me some breakfast, there's a good fellow. I wonder if they've come. You've heard me talk of May, Fanshawe? She's not the sort of girl every fellow likes, and I've thought she was hard on me sometimes. Superior, you know—that sort of thing. Looking down, by Jove, upon her brother." And here Tom laughed loudly, with an exquisite en-

joyment of the joke. "But it would be pleasant to see her all the same. Who is that at the door? What! My sister! By George, May, this is being a thorough brick, and no mistake."

"Oh, Tom, you are better!" cried Marjory, struck with a sudden weakness of delight as she saw the colour in his face and his sparkling eyes.

"Almost well," he said, cheerfully, while she stooped over him; "well enough to be sorry I sent for you, and glad you've come. So you thought your poor wicked old brother worth looking after? You're a good girl, May; you're a dear girl. It's a pleasure to see you. And you're a beauty, too, by Jove, that can stand the morning light."

"Tom!" said Marjory, gently.

She was struck to the heart by the sight she saw. His countenance had melted into soft lines like a child's; the tears were standing in his over-bright eyes. Who does not know that human sentiment which trembles to see a sick man look too amiable, too angelical, too *good?* This sudden dread came over Marjory. She stood gazing at him and at the moisture in his eyes with a feeling

that blanched all the morning freshness out of her face.

"All right," said Tom. "I won't praise you to your face, especially as Fanshawe's there; though he's as good a fellow as ever was. I'll tell you after, all I owe to him. But who came with you, May? and how did you persuade the two old boys to let you go? and how's my father and little Milly, and all the rest of them? Sit down here, where I can reach you. Fanshawe, she wants a cup of tea or something."

"I want to hear about you, Tom," said Marjory, mastering, as well as she could, the impression made upon her by her brother's emotion, and by the dark uncheering looks of Fanshawe, his previous nurse, who had shaken hands with her, but who avoided her eye. "But first I must tell you, the two old boys, as you call them, came with me. My father is here."

"My father—here!" said the prodigal, once more raising his head from the pillow. A crimson flush came over his face, and his eyes filled with tears. "I told you they were fond of me at home," he said, turning faltering

to his friend, "and by Jove, May—no, I won't say that—By God, as you're both witnesses, I'll turn over a new leaf, and be a comfort to him from this day!"

By an impulse which she could scarcely define, Marjory turned from her brother's flushed and excited face to Fanshawe, who had retired to the other side of the room, and whom she had seen joining his hands together with a sudden movement of pain. When he caught her eye he shook his head gently. Then she knew what was before them.

Mr. Heriot, however, suspected nothing; he came in, still with something of the paleness which had come upon him when he first realized the news; but in five minutes had recovered his colour, and composure, and was himself.

"Your sister was anxious, my boy!" he said. "It is a woman's fault; and, for my part, I don't blame them. Rather that than man's indifference, Tom. May would go through fire and water for anybody belonging to her. It makes them troublesome to steady-going folks, now and then; but it's a good fault—a good fault."

And Mr. Heriot, after a few minutes, cheerfully invited Mr. Fanshawe—to whom he made many old-fashioned acknowledgments—to go downstairs with him to breakfast, leaving Marjory with her brother.

"We'll send her something upstairs," he said; "I know she'll like best to be with Tom."

"She should get a rest first," said Mr. Charles, grumbling momentarily in behalf of his favourite; but finally they all left the sick-room, going down to breakfast in high spirits. Tom, by this time, somewhat pale, lay back on his pillows, and looked admiringly and gratefully at his sister. A certain calm of well-being seemed to have fallen over him, which in, spite of herself, gave Marjory hope.

"And to think," he said softly, "that last night—only last night, I had given everything up, and never hoped to see one of you again. May, give me your hand; you're a good girl. It's true what my father said: you would go through fire and water. That's the old Scotch way; not so much for other people as women are now-a-days; but through fire and water—through fire

and water, for your own! If you had been here last night I might have told you something—"

"Tell it to me now, Tom."

"No; I don't want you to think worse of me than you do. Please God, I will live and mend, and take up all my tangled threads, as Aunt Jean says. How is old Aunt Jean? Cankered body! but I suppose she would have done it too—through fire and water. Do you know, May, there's a great deal of meaning, sometimes, in what these old boys say."

"I wish you would not call them old boys, Tom."

"Well, well—they are not young boys, are they? There is one thing tho' about women—or, so I've always heard, at least. They say you're hard on other women. If you were called on now to help a woman that was not your flesh and blood?—for the sake of those who were your flesh and blood—"

Marjory's face was covered with a deep blush; there was but one idea that could be connected with such a speech; she had to conquer a mo-

mentary repugnance, an impulse of indignation and shame. But she did conquer it.

"Tom!" she said anxiously; "I hope I could be faithful to my trust. Tell me what it is?"

"Not I!" said Tom, laughing. "No, no, Miss May; I am not going to give you the whiphand over me. I can trust myself best. I am getting well, thank Heaven; and I'll pick up my tangled threads. It is not a bad phrase that, either. Lord, what a lot of tangled threads I seemed to be leaving last night!"

What could Marjory say? She held his hand between hers and patted it softly, and kissed it with her heart full. It was not like a sick man's hand, white and wasted. It was brown and muscular, and strong, capable of crushing hers, had he wished; and yet lay somewhat passively embraced by her slender fingers, as if—like the tide ebbing slowly from the shore, the strength had begun to ebb away.

"However, it's well to be warned," said Tom. "And, after all, I have done less harm than you would think; nobody's enemy but my own—as

people say. There's no sensation I ever felt so curious as that one—of thinking you're dying. What an awful fool you've been, you say to yourself; and now it's no good. Struggle as you like, you can't mend it; you must just lie still and take what's coming. I say, May," he added, with a sudden start. "Say something and be cheery, or I'll get into the dumps again."

"Here's the doctor, Tom," said Fanshawe at the door.

Marjory rose and left the room quickly; she could not bear to meet the eye of that final authority, whose glance seems to convey life or death. She went and stood by her brother's friend outside on the landing. It was an old-fashioned winding oak staircase; and looking down they could see the movements of the house; the waiters carrying in dishes to the room where the father and uncle were breakfasting; and sometimes, when the door opened, could hear the roll of their vigorous Northern voices. Marjory stood with her hand on the oak balustrade, and looked wistfully into Fanshawe's face.

"Do you mean," she said, "that there is no hope?"

He made a little gesture of pain and shook his head; his eyes looked hollow, as if with tears. It was watching that had done it, but the effect was the same.

"Then he ought to know; he must know!" said Marjory.

"To what good, Miss Heriot? Do you think God takes a man unawares like that, to exact everything from him the same as if he had had long warning? I am not so good as you; but I think better of my Maker than that."

"Mr. Fanshawe, this is no time to argue;" said Marjory, shivering; "but my poor Tom ought to know."

"It would kill him in a moment," said Fanshawe; "the shock would be too great; he has few enough moments to live. Go and pray for him, Miss Heriot; that's better than telling him. You are far more likely to be paid attention to up yonder than fellows like poor Tom or me."

And all the while fresh dishes were being

carried in from the kitchen, and Mr. Heriot's laugh, a large sound of ease and relief—the gaiety of a man just delivered from deadly anxiety—rang like a certainty of well-being all through the house. The breakfast was still going on when the doctor went downstairs; his grave face startled Tom's father.

"You find your patient better, doctor?" he said.

"I cannot say I do," the doctor answered, somewhat solemnly. "Though his strength has held out better than I thought."

"But I assure you—the boy is looking as well as I ever saw him. His colour is good, and his eyes bright; and no suffering to speak of."

"The explanation of that is but too easy," said the doctor. "I suppose no one has told you the particulars. So long as there was pain there was a little hope. It is a hard thing to say to a father, but I must say it. Your son's injury, Sir, is in the spine."

"My God!"

Mr. Heriot stumbled up blindly from his

chair; he put his hand out to grope his way to the door, and with the other thrust away from him the table at which he had been seated. The doctor rushed after and seized him by the arm.

"If you go into his room with that face, you will kill him on the spot!" he cried.

"And when will you—or nature, as you call it—kill him?" cried Mr. Charles, coming forward in his turn. "Thomas, my man, Thomas! you've still the others left."

"He may last a few hours longer—not more," said the doctor. "I shall come back presently;" and he rushed away, glad to escape from such a scene, and left those whom it most concerned to bear it as they could.

The two old brothers had taken each other by the hand. They stood together as they had done when they were boys; but one had his face hidden on the wall, against which he leant and heard the words of the other vaguely through his anguish, as if they were uttered miles away.

"Thomas! think. He is not your only child! there are others well worthy of your love. We must grieve—it's God's will; but for God's sake dinna despair!"

What mockery the words seemed; merest commonplaces, easy to say, but hard, impossible to give an ear to. Despair? what else was there left for the man who was about to see his son die?

CHAPTER VI.

He lingered the greater part of the day. Marjory took her place permanently by his bedside, where Fanshawe had been seated when she first appeared. She had allowed herself to be entreated to say nothing to him; but a certain fixed awe and pain in her look communicated themselves to Tom's mind without a word said. He noticed this at first with an uneasy laugh.

"Ah, I see you think badly of me, May. You think I am going, though I deceive myself. Don't deny it. If I was not so sure by my feelings that you are wrong, you would make me think so too."

"I am anxious," she said. "You know

what papa says, Tom, it is a woman's fault."

"Ay, so he did," said her brother; "he has sense enough for half-a-dozen. I wish I had minded him more. May, you needn't be so frightened. If I am going, as you think—well, well! there would be nothing to be so dismal about. It has to be one time or another. If it were not for all those tangled threads, and things done that shouldn't have been done, and left undone that should have been done, like the Prayer-Book. I suppose it's the common way. Good and bad would not say it every Sunday, if it were not the common way."

"It is the very commonest way of all, Tom."

"I thought so. Then I'll be forgiven, too, like the rest, if that's all. The old doctor at Comlie would be harder on a fellow than the Prayer-book is. You're great for the Kirk, May, and I suppose, as we're Scotch, you're right; but if I were a religious fellow, which I'm not, I would go in for the Prayer-Book,

mind you; it's kinder; it asks fewer questions. We have done what we ought not to have done; we have left undone—If I had time just now, and felt up to it, I would like to tell you something, May."

"Tell me, Tom," she said, eagerly. "We are quiet now; there's nobody here."

"Presently," he said; and then fell into a musing state, from which she could not rouse him. Now and then he would brighten up, and call her attention to a fly on the ceiling; to the pattern of the paper on the walls; to an old picture over the mantel-piece; smiling and commenting upon them.

"The walls should not be papered in a room where a man is to lie ill," he said. "If you knew what strange figures they turn into. There's an old witch in that corner with a red nose and a red cap; don't you see her? Last night she kept sailing about the room on a broomstick, or something; and, by Jove! there is that unhappy fly astride on her red nose!"

At this idea he laughed feebly, yet loudly.

How that laugh echoed down into May's heart! He would not allow anything more serious to be spoken of.

"I am too tired to be sensible," he said. "Don't disturb my fly, May. He's numb, poor fellow, after the Winter. I only hope if the witch takes to riding about again, to-night, she won't disturb him. I dont see her broomstick to-day. Trifling talk, eh? To be sure, it's nonsense; but if a man may not indulge in a little nonsense when he's laid by the heels like this, and has a nice sister smiling at him—"

Here the poor fellow put out his hand to her, which Marjory took within her own, doing her best to keep up the smile which pleased him, though there were few exertions of strength which would not have been easier to her at the moment.

"I like nonsense," she said, softly. "But, Tom, somebody will come in presently and disturb us. Tell me, dear, first what you wanted to say."

"Presently," said Tom. "I have not quite

made up my mind about it. There's time enough —time enough. Show Uncle Charles that print when he comes up. I think it's a good one. I thought of him as soon as I saw it. What quiet steady-going lives now, these old fellows live! It's strange for a man to think of settling down into that sort of thing, you know, but I suppose I shall come to it in time like the rest. Farming, like my father, or prints, and books, and coins, and so forth. May, you women have other kind of ideas; but fancy giving up youth, and stir, and movement, and all that makes life pleasant—for that."

"I suppose when one is old it is the quietness that makes life pleasant," said poor Marjory, aching to her very finger-points with a sense that this life was ebbing away while they thus talked.

"By Jove, I don't think it would ever make life pleasant to me," said Tom. And then with a curious consciousness, he looked up at her, half defiant, half inquiring. "You think, I suppose," he said, "that I will never give myself the chance to try if I go on in this way. Never you

fear, May; I know when to pull up as well as you do. Fun first, sobriety afterwards—never you fear. I may have had about my swing by this time. Mind, I make no rash promises, but if I keep in the same mind when I get better— I suppose the old boy would give me a house somewhere, when I'm married and settled. Married and settled!" he repeated, with a somewhat wild laugh; and then stopped abruptly, and added, "that's the worst of it—there's the rub."

Marjory did not follow this lead; she had grown confused with misery, feeling that she sinned against him, trying to think of something she could say to him which should lead his mind to other thoughts. She saw nothing but levity in what he said, and her own mind seemed paralysed. She could have thrown herself upon him and begged him in so many words to think that he was dying; but nothing less direct than this seemed possible. She sat by him, holding his hand between hers, gazing wistfully at him, but with her mind far from what he was saying, labouring and struggling

to think of something that would warn without alarming him. He, for his part, looked at her somewhat wistfully too. Certain words seemed on his very lips, which one syllable from her, had she but comprehended, would have drawn forth; but, in the inscrutable isolation of humanity, the two pair of eyes met, both overbrimming with meaning, but with a meaning incommunicable. What a pitiful gaze it was on both sides!

At last Marjory, feeling the silence insupportable, burst forth into a few faltering words, from which she tried hard to keep all appearance of strong emotion.

"Tom, we used to say our prayers in the nursery together when you were ill, don't you remember? 'Pray God take away Tom's fever,' I used to say. And this is so like old times. Tom—I don't think I said my prayers this morning—"

He put up his hand to stop her, and then his countenance changed and melted, and some moisture came into his bright eyes. He gave a strange little laugh.

"I was a better boy in those days than I am now."

"You never made yourself out to be good," said Marjory, with tears; "but you were always good to me. Oh, God bless you, dear Tom! if we were only to say, 'Our Father'—after being up all night—don't you think it would do us good?"

"Say what you like, May."

The words were common-place, but not the tone; and Marjory, with his hand clasped tighter within hers, was kneeling down by the bed, when the door opened, and their father came in. Mr. Heriot had grown ten years older in that half hour. He came in with a miserable smile, put on at the door as a woman might have put on a veil.

"Well, Tom, my man, and how are we getting on now?" he said, with an attempt at hearty jocularity, most pitifully unlike his natural tone.

Tom looked from his father's ghostly pretence at ease to his sister's face, as she knelt by the bed, with his hand pressed between hers, now

and then softly kissing it, and smiling at him with an effort which became more and more painful. A change came over his own countenance. With a sudden scared look, he thrust his other hand into his father's, and grasped him tight, like a frightened child.

"Don't let me go!" he cried, with one momentary unspeakable pang.

Then swiftly as the mind moves at moments in which a whole life-time seems concentrated, he recovered his mental balance. How few fail at that grand crisis! He recovered himself with one of those strange rallyings of mental courage which make all sorts of men die bravely with fortitude and calm. The whole revolution of feeling—enlightenment, despair, self-command—passed so quickly that only spectators equally absorbed and concentrated could have followed them.

"Well!" he said, finally, "if it is to be so, we must bear it, father. We must bear it as well as we can."

Meanwhile Mr. Charles, not knowing what to do with himself, had examined everything in the

sitting-room downstairs, not because there was anything to interest him, but because, while he suffered as much as the others, he had not, like the others, a primary claim to be with the chief sufferer of all.

"Best leave them alone, best leave them alone," he had said to himself a dozen times over. "They're better alone with him—better alone."

But his mind was full of *malaise*, anxiety, and pain. And after a while he wandered out into the yard of the inn, where still there was a great commotion, horses and dogs about, and a floating population of grooms. Mr. Charles went and looked at one or two of the slim glossy hunters which were being taken out for exercise, or which were being prepared to depart, as the hunting season approached its end. He was a man of very different tastes; yet he was country-born and country-bred, and knew the points of a horse. Poor man, this new investigation chimed in strangely with the very different thoughts in his mind. He looked at the animals with an eye that could not help seeing, but an aching heart

whose attention was directed elsewhere. While he was thus standing in the middle of the yard, vaguely examining everything around him, the deformed old ostler came up to him once more.

"Beg your pardon, Sir, but do you know if they've sent for the bone-setter, Sir, as I spoke to you and the lady about? T'other old gentleman won't listen to me, not on no consideration. He's awful cut up, he is; and I ask you, Sir, as a gentleman and a scholar, is this a time to be standing on p's and q's, and thinking what's most genteel and that? Job Turner ain't genteel, but he'll save Mr. 'Eriot's life, soon as look at 'im. Do'ee have him, now; do'ee have 'im;" cried the old man, with tears in the strange little blear eyes which shone out of his face from among the dark puckers of his cheeks and brow like diamonds. "Them brutes would have had the breath out o' me years and years since, if it hadn't a-been for Job. Every bone in my body, Sir, he's put to rights, and joined together sometime. Now, do'ee have him; do'ee now, my gentleman! he'll mend Mr. 'Eriot like he

mended me. Men is alike, just as 'osses is alike; they've the same bones, and flesh and blood. Nature makes no account o' one being a gentleman and one in the stables Oh, Lord bless you, Sir, do'ee have him, or you'll never forgive yourself. You all know Job Turner, mates; speak up for him, for God's sake, and let the gentleman hear what he is."

"He's a rare 'un for bones!" cried one of the grooms.

"He'll work your joint back into its socket, like as it was a strayed babby!" cried another.

"Ain't he now; don't he now, boys!" cried the old ostler; "speak up for him, for God's sake; it's for young Mr. 'Eriot, as always was the pleasantest gentleman I ever see in a 'unting field, or out on't; he gave me ten bob just for nothing at all, the last blessed morning as ever he rode out o' this yere yard. Lord bless you, Sir, we'll have him up and well in a week if you won't mind his not being genteel, and send for Job."

"Hold your nonsense!" said another man, interfering. "Job ain't the Lord to kill and

make alive. The young gentleman's broken his back; send you for the clergyman, or some one as 'll give him good advice, Sir. They ain't fit to die at a moment's notice, no more nor the likes of us. Send for the clergyman, Sir, if you'll take my advice."

Mr. Charles stood and looked from one to the other with a certain weary bewilderment; he felt as if the family misfortune, which had thus fallen upon the Hay-Heriots, out of all precedent, a thing that never had happened before, had made him a mark at which every kind of arrow might be shot. He shook his head as he went away, pursued by the old ostler's entreaties.

"One thing is certain, that these bone-setting bodies learn a great deal about the human frame," he said to himself; "not scientific information, but something that's like inspiration sometimes. It might be too late; or it might be nonsense altogether. Perhaps he could do nothing for poor Tom, perhaps—should I go back and speak to Thomas, and try? But what's the good of disturbing the poor fellow for nothing? It could not come to anything; you may mend

legs and arms, but you cannot mend the spine. God bless us all; this is what it comes to, to give a lad his own way, and let him take his swing! And it will kill his father. Never was it known yet, in all the records, that a Hay-Heriot died like this—the heir without an heir; leaving it all to go in the second line. If I could but know whether this Job what-do-you-call-him would be of any use! It would worry Thomas to ask him; but what of that if it saved the lad? My mind's in a terrible swither, whether to try or not. Job! Job! It's an uncanny kind of name. Oh, my bonnie May, if I could but have five minutes speech of you to say ay or no! And there's no time, if anything can be done. I think I'll risk it. God help us! He knows; but we do not; it can do no harm. Hey! hi! hem! you crooked old body! That's uncivil; he'll pay no attention. I want the other man, a bit little withered up, crooked—Hi! my good man; come here and tell me where your Job—what do you call him—is to be found. I don't know if he can do anything; but if you'll show me where he lives, I'll try."

"Lord bless you, Sir, I knew as you were a reasonable gentleman," said the ostler, limping up. "It's but a poor place, but what o' that? and master and groom we're all much the same. Leastways, so far as bones go, as is the foundation like. This way, Sir; it ain't above ten minutes from here—if Job's in; which he ain't always, at this time of the day. Gentlefolks thinks little of him; but poor folks think much; and he's out and about over all the country, wherever there is a leg out, or a bone broken. It is a chance if we find 'im; but a man can but do his best, when all's said; and it ain't not more than ten, or say fifteen minutes walk."

"Quick, man, quick!" said Mr. Charles; but the road to Job's house was through the back streets of the little town, which were swarming with children, and full of wandering provision merchants selling vegetables and earthenware, and a great many other descriptions of merchandize; for it was Saturday, and market-day. To the stranger, with his sick heart and his brain buzzing with pain and suspense, the twistings and turnings of the narrow lanes, the streets

they had to cross, the passages they threaded through, the corners they turned seemed endless. What a fool's errand it was, after all, he thought! and then something seemed to call him, which sounded now like Marjory's appealing voice—now like poor Tom's cry of pain. What was he doing here, astray, in a strange place? seeking out some unknown quack; leaving his own people perhaps to bear "the worst that could happen," without such support as he could give? He suddenly turned round, while his guide was enlarging upon Job's gifts, and upon the unlikelihood of finding him—an argument which was not intended to discourage Mr. Charles, but only to enhance Job's importance—

"Go yourself and find him!" he said; "I'm going back! I'm going back! I may be wanted. Bring the man, and I'll pay him—and you too." And with these words Mr. Charles darted across the street, with a vain but confident endeavour to re-traverse the way he had come. He fell over the children; he was all but run down by the wheelbarrows; and as was natural, he lost his way. And words could not tell the painful con-

fusion of his mind as he wound in and out, round and round in a circle, never seeming to approach a step nearer; growing every moment more wretched, more anxious, more confused; figuring to himself what might be passing in the sick-room; how he might be wanted; and how "the worst" might have happened, while he was about this wild-goose chase. When he got back at last to the door of the hotel, the old ostler had reached it before him, and stood waiting in the yard with a villainous companion, who pulled his forelock to the confused and tremulous gentleman, and announced himself as Job Turner.

"You mayn't think he's much to look at, Sir," whispered the ostler, under shelter of his hand; "but if you knowed all, as I know—the cures he's done; the bones he's set; the folk as he's brought up from the grave—"

Mr. Charles waved his hand—he was too breathless to speak—and hurried upstairs. A dead calm seemed to have fallen on the house. A frightened woman-servant met him on the stairs, creeping down on tiptoe. It seemed to be years that he had been wandering about

the streets, absent from his post. Then the doctor met him, and pointed silently to the closed door, shaking his head. Trembling, conscience-stricken, weary and sick with his suspense, Mr. Charles crept into the sick-room. All was quiet and silent there, except some gasps for breath. Mr. Heriot stood at one side of the bed, Marjory at the other. Fanshawe, Tom's friend, was at the foot, leaning against the bed, and hiding his face with his hand. Mr. Charles trembled too much to be of use to any one; he stood behind them all, wiping his forehead, trying to see with his hot and dazzled eyes.

Nothing to be done, and nothing to be said! It had come to that. Tom was out of hearing, though they had so much to say to him. And he, too, had much to say, but had left it all unsaid. Who can tell the anguish of such a moment for those who are called upon to survive? To stand by helpless, impotent; willing to do everything, capable of nothing—nothing but to look on. Humanity has no agony so great.

At the very last, poor Tom came out of his death-struggle, as by a miracle, and looked at his watchers.

"I told you, May," he said, faintly. "I told you!" These were his last words. He seemed to die repeating them in a whisper, which grew fainter and fainter: "I told her—told her; I told—thank God!"

Oh! for what, poor deceived soul? They looked at each other with a thrill of terror which overcame even their grief. What did he thank God for as he crossed the threshold of the other life?

CHAPTER VII.

THE Manse of Comlie had one window, which looked upon the churchyard—only one, as Mrs. Murray congratulated herself—and that in a room which was never used but where on occasional moments now and then the old lady would go and sit by herself, not rejecting for her own part the pensive associations which she deprecated for others. On the day of poor Tom Heriot's funeral, there were two old faces at this window. One was that of Miss Jean Heriot, in new "blacks," as she called her mourning; whose interest in the melancholy ceremony had overcome even that strong sense of decorum with which a Scottish woman of her age would, under other circum-

stances, have shut herself up on the day of a funeral "in the family."

In Scotland, in former days, the attendance of a woman at a funeral was unknown; and it was partly because it was understood that Marjory was to be present, that her old grand-aunt stole across in the early morning, before any one was about, in order to witness, with a mixture of grief, interest, and disapproval, the innovations in the simple ceremonial with which the heir of Pitcomlie was conducted to his last resting-place.

"I don't know what we are coming to," said Miss Jean. "You may like these new-fangled ways, Mrs. Murray; but for my part, I would just as soon take to the Prayer-book for good and a', and be done with compromises; or even the mass-book, for that matter. When you once begin to pray over a grave, how long do you think it'll be before you pray for the dead?"

"It will never be in the doctor's time, that I can answer for," said the Minister's wife, with firmness. "For my part, if it's an innovation,

it pleases me. Oh! to hear the thud of the earth, and no' a word said! It is bad enough —bad enough, even when it's done like baptism, in the name of the Father and the Son."

"If you had not been there, you would not have heard," interrupted Miss Jean. "I hate to see women trailing after a funeral; it's no their place."

"I was not there, and yet I heard," said Mrs. Murray; "there are things you hear with your heart, though you're far away. And why should not women go to the grave with those that belong to them? It is us that takes care of them to their last breath. Why should not May come with the rest to lay her brother in his grave? after standing by him, poor lad, till his end."

"It would fit her best to stay at home," said Aunt Jean; "women are always best at home, especially when they're young. Thomas has brought up that girl his own way, not my way. I would have trained her very different. When I was Marjory's age I never dared lift up

my face to my mother. What she said should be, it was—no contradiction; no setting up to know better than your elders; whereas it's my devout opinion that girl thinks herself wiser than the likes of you or me."

"And so she is in some things," said Mrs. Murray; "far wiser than me, at least, Miss Jean. I've seen her pose the doctor himself, which is not saying little. And here they are, coming down by the east knoll. Oh! what a black, black procession! And to think it's Tom Heriot! waes me! waes me!—him that should have been bidding us all to his bridal instead of this cruel grave-side!"

Miss Jean said nothing for the moment. She put her aged head close to the window, and followed with an intent gaze of her bright old eyes the dark line that wound down into the churchyard from the higher ground above. What strange sense of the wonder of it may have passed through her mind, who can tell? She was old; her generation was over; not one of those who had been with her in her youth was with her now. Alone, a spectator of the

works and ways that were not as her ways and works, she had been keenly looking on and criticising the younger world around for many a day. She had seen the boy born whose remains were now carried before her; she had almost seen his father born. Yet she was here, still a keen spectator, looking on while that young representative of the race was laid among their ancestors.

She said nothing; her sharp eyes glittered as she gazed; she folded her thin hands, all wrinkled and yellow, like old ivory, on the top of her cane, and nothing escaped her keen observation. She took in the new—or what she fancied new—fashion of Marjory's dress, as well as the enormous train of county friends, old family connections, tenants, and neighbours, who had come to do honour to the Heriots. This gave her a thrill of pleasure in the chillness of her old age, which felt no very strenuous emotion. She counted them upon her withered fingers as they passed down into the grassy churchyard, and ranged themselves against the grey old lichened wall which surrounded it on

that side, set close with the grotesque monuments of the last two centuries.

"I see scarce anybody wanting," she said, with a certain subdued exultation; "scarce anybody on this side of Fife but the Sinclairs, and they're away. Thomas does not please me in many of his ways; but I'll say this for him, that he has kept up the credit of the house, and all the old family friends."

Mrs. Murray was crying quietly, with her eyes fixed upon the central group, where stood Mr. Heriot himself, with drooping head, his tall figure showing among all the other tall men who surrounded him with a certain majesty of weakness which went to the heart of this looker-on. His daughter seemed to be leaning on his arm, but by the way in which she clung to him, moving as he moved, Mrs. Murray devined that in reality it was Marjory who supported her father.

It was a bright day, perfectly serene and calm; the sun shining, a gentle little breeze caressing the waving grass, and breathing softly over the mourners. There had been rain in

the morning, so that everything was dewy and moist. It was what country people call "a growing day;" a day on which you could almost see the new buds opening out, and hear the new blades of the grass escape out of their sheaths; a day of life and overbrimming vitality; the kind of day in which it is hardest to think of dying or of death.

"Eh, waes me, waes me!" said the old lady, who knew what loss was, with the tears running down her soft old cheeks, as the coffin was lowered into the grave.

Then rose that strangely solemn sound—one voice rising in the open air in the daylight, amidst the hush of a crowd, a sound not to be mistaken for any other, and which chills the very soul of the chance hearer, while it so often gives a momentary consolation to the mourner. Mrs. Murray bowed down her old head, weeping at the sound of her husband's prayer, which was too far off to be heard. But Miss Jean kept gazing, her bright little eyes shining out of her head, her cap pressed closely against the window.

"New-fangled ways—new-fangled ways!" she was saying to herself. "What the better is the poor body for all that praying? The lad's soul is beyond the power of prayer. He's in his Maker's hand. He was but an ill young lad, and I'm glad for your sake that the doctor has nothing to say about things that can never be known till all's known. I cannot abide these changes. I approved Marjory when she threw in her lot with the old Kirk, though brought up otherwise; but I do not approve of changing auld forms and ways to make them like anither ritual. No, no; that's not a thing I can approve. But half Fife is there," she added, with a long-drawn breath of satisfaction, "I am thankful to think that the family is not letten down, whatever happens. There's Lord Largo himself, or I'm sore mistaken, and all the family from Magus-moor. It shows great respect—great respect. Thomas Heriot may be proud; there's men there that would not have come so far for King or Commons. I'm thankful myself to see that real old friendship aye lasts. Marjory being there is the only eyesore to me. She should have stayed at home.

Women should bide at home. It would have set her better to have learned a lesson to her young sister how life's uncertain and death's sure."

"Poor bairn! she will learn that soon enough."

Miss Jean made no reply. She leant her chin upon her cane, and kept looking out, the slight tremulous movement of her head communicating a certain vibration to all the outline of her figure and black drapery. Her mind was intent upon the different groups standing about against the grey churchyard wall, bareheaded under the sun. One by one she recognised them, with her keen eyes. She had known them and their fathers and grandfathers before them, every one. The central group of all was perhaps that which the old woman noted least. She had been grieved for "the family" chiefly because Tom was the heir, and the property must now go to the second son, a thing which was unknown in the Heriot traditions. But her grief was short and soon exhausted, as perhaps every strong sentiment is at her age. She no longer thought of Tom, nor

of his desolate father, for whom at first she had been very sorry. What she was principally concerned with, was to see that all was done as it ought to be done, and that nowhere was there any failure of "respect." And on this point she had been fully satisfied, so that the effect upon her mind, as she sat at the Manse window, was rather one of deep and sombre gratification than of grief.

"Thomas Heriot may be proud," she repeated to herself, and she was sincerely unconscious of any incongruity in the thought.

"There's a man there I never saw before," she added, after a pause, "standing closer to my nephew Thomas Heriot and that old fool, Charlie, than a stranger should be. If he was a chief mourner he could not be nearer. If any of them had any sense they would see that was my Lord Largo's place. After the near friends comes the highest rank. I wonder what Thomas can be thinking of; and I would like to know who is yon man."

"It is Mr. Fanshawe, poor Tom's friend," said Mrs. Murray, with a half-restrained sob, "that

nursed him when he had the accident, and sent for them, and has been the kindest friend. It was him that brought Mr. Heriot down, heart-broken as he was. Marjory could never have done it without him, as I hear. Mrs. Simpson was over," added the old lady, apologetically, afraid of seeming to know better than "a relation," "to settle about some of the servants' mourning, and it was from her I heard."

"Marjory could never have done it!" said Miss Jean, with some scorn. "If Marjory is at the bottom of everything, she should learn better than to make difficulties. When a woman sets up for being helpless, she can aye get help; but when she sets up for being the mainspring of everything, she has to give up such pretences. Marjory could not have done without him— He's come to help Marjory, has he? I know what that means. For once in their lives the Heriots are going to show a little judgment and marry Marjory. In that way ye can understand yon stranger being so near."

"Oh, Miss Jean, God forgive you!" said Mrs.

Murray. "Why should you judge the worst? It is nothing of the sort."

"I'll keep my opinion, and you'll keep yours," said Miss Jean, grimly. "Am I blaming them? The girls that have been born Heriots have never had anything done for them. Every thing for the lads; for the lasses they took their chance. If a good man came, good and well; if it was but an indifferent man, they did what they liked—took him or not according to their fancy; as may be well seen, for all the daughters have married badly, everyone, except those that did not marry at all. Na, na, I'm not blaming them. There's even myself; if my father and my brother had taken an interest—if they had put themselves out of their way—I might have had bairns and grandbairns of my own, and held up my head as high as any. But I was left a motherless thing to do what I liked, to refuse good offers, and act like a fool, and throw away my prospects before I knew what they meant. If Thomas Heriot is taking more thought for his girrl, it's no' from me that he'll have any blame."

"Poor man!" said the Minister's wife, "this is not a moment to expect him to take much thought."

"It's a moment when it's very important to do all he can for Marjory," said Miss Jean tartly. "There's Tom gone, poor lad, that was not steady enough to marry; and if anything was to happen to Thomas, I ask you what would become of that girrl? A girrl always brought up to be mistress and mair? The property goes to young Charles, and he's married to a strange woman that nobody knows; and what would become of Marjory? She'll rule the roost no more as she's done all her life; she'll drop into Mr. Heriot of Pitcomlie's sister, and *I* know what that means."

"She has been Mr. Heriot of Pitcomlie's daughter all her life, and desired no better," said Mrs. Murray.

"Oh, ay, but that's very different. She'll want for nothing," said Miss Jean, reflectively, "she'll have plenty to live on. She'll have her own little money and old Charlie's money, and mine when I go; but she'll be of no more con-

sequence in the countryside—no more consequence than——me," said the old lady. "No' so much, for you're all feared for me. It will be a terrible downcome for Marjory. No, no, if her father thinks of marrying her to Tom's friend, or anybody's friend, that can give her a good house over her head and a position, it's not from me that he'll get any blame."

"Oh, Miss Jean, it's little such thoughts are in any of their heads," said Mrs. Murray. "Mr. Heriot's heart's broken; he thinks neither of marrying nor giving in marriage. Eh, poor man! poor man! he's turning away now, leaving the grave, leaving his first-born out there in the rain and the snow, and the hot sun and winter wind. I've done it myself. I know what it is. God help him! He's thinking neither of marrying nor of Marjory. He's thinking but of him that's gone."

"He should do his duty to the living whoever's gone," said Miss Jean, watching with her sharp old eyes. "And Thomas Heriot's sore failed," she added to herself, eagerly looking out as the melancholy procession turned to the gate close

by the Manse where the carriages were waiting. "He is sore failed. I should not be surprised if he was not long for this world; and then what will that girrl do?"

CHAPTER VIII.

EDWARD FANSHAWE, the individual whose appearance at Tom Heriot's funeral had excited Miss Jean's curiosity so strongly, was, perhaps, about the last man in England to whom Mr. Heriot of Pitcomlie, or any other father, would have confided his daughter's happiness. Almost all that could be said in his favour was negative. There was no harm in him. He had never been involved in any discreditable transaction; he had wronged nobody; he had not even bored his friends. A certain fine instinct, indeed, in this respect, possessed the man; he had no high moral qualities, no principles to speak of, no plan of life nor rule of action; but he was never a bore. He perceived, with the quickness of lightning, the moment when his friends had had enough

of him. Perhaps that moment arrived simultaneously with the moment in which he felt that he had enough of them; anyhow, he chose it with the most admirable exactitude. It was the one great quality of his character; he was like the sun in Hood's poem, which "never came an hour too soon," and he never stayed a moment too late.

Mr. Fanshawe was always agreeable, sympathetic, ready to interest himself in what interested those about him; he was a gentleman of the best blood and connections—cousin to Lord Strangeways, once removed, and allied by the mother's side to the Duchess of Dimsdale, whose name is a sufficient guarantee, we trust, for any man's gentility. He had just the amount of family and of money which is best adapted to demoralize a man, and turn him away from the natural and wholesome channels of use. And at the same time he had no land, no local habitation to keep up, no duties to do. What he had was in money, which a careful father had so locked up that the poor fellow could not even ruin himself by spending everything, and thus give himself the chance of a new start. He could only forestall his income, which he did

continually, with more or less painful consequences to himself, and no great harm to anybody else; for he was weak-minded enough to have a prejudice in favour of paying his debts, though he seldom did it until considerably after date. He was not a fool, any more than he was a rogue; he was the very best, gentlest, most amiable, kind, and harmless of good-for-nothings; but a good-for-nothing he was. He had no vices, not even that of active selfishness, which, in such a man, might have been the first step to virtue. He was a little over thirty, but felt as if he had never been any younger, and never would be any older. He was not appalled by the thought of all the openings in life which he had thrown aside; or of the men who had passed him on the way, or of the advantages he had let slip. The past did not upbraid him, neither did the future alarm him. He never thought of asking himself what was to become of him when his active manhood began to droop. "To-morrow shall be as to-day," he said to himself; or rather he did not say it, for he never went so far as to have any talk with himself on the subject.

Fanshawe had rooms in London, where he appeared generally for a portion of the season. He had been in the habit of meeting Tom Heriot in Leicestershire for the hunting, just as he was in the habit of meeting certain other kinds of men, periodically, in other places. By means of thus dividing his year, and keeping to the regular routine of change, of which men without any duties make a kind of fantastic duty for themselves, his acquaintance was simply unlimited. He knew all kinds of people, and most of the people whom he knew, he knew intimately. This was how Tom Heriot and he had become friends—friends by accident as it were, by the mere fact of meeting year after year in the same place, doing the same thing at the same moment. They had been intimates, but no more friends than this implies, at the moment when Tom, by Fanshawe's side, was struck by the stroke of that grim unsuspected Death which hovers about the hunting-field. It was Fanshawe who helped to lift him, to disengage him from his fallen horse, and carry him to the bed which turned out to be his death-bed. And the two nights of watching which

followed made Fanshawe something like Tom Heriot's brother, made him the benefactor of Tom Heriot's family, the object of their warmest gratitude, and connected for ever with poor Tom's name and memory. Nothing could be more real than this connexion, and yet nothing could be more accidental or arbitrary.

The position was quite false, for he knew in reality but little of Tom; and yet it was perfectly natural and true, for he had been to Tom in his hour of need all that a brother could have been; and to Tom's father and sister this stranger was no more a stranger; he was a son, a brother, "Tom's dearest friend." And it seemed only natural to both parties that Fanshawe should accompany the mournful *cortége* to Pitcomlie—and that he who had watched Tom so tenderly should help to lay him in his grave, should support his fellow-watchers, and do what he could to console his friend's family.

This had seemed perfectly natural to Fanshawe, who was ever sympathetic and ready to help. Besides, Scotland was not to him an unknown place. He had gone to the North often

enough, to shooting boxes and castles among the moors. Scotland meant game and deer-stalking, mountains and lochs, and vigorous exercise, according to his understanding. Of course he was well enough aware that April is not the moment for such delights. He must have known too that no delights were possible in the circumstances, and that his goodnature was about to plunge him into a new kind of experience, and not a cheerful one. But yet if he ever paused to think where he was going, he was of opinion that he knew perfectly what the manner of living was. And it may be supposed that to such a man it was strange and somewhat overpowering to find himself at the end of a few days stranded as it were on the quietest coast, in the midst of the most tranquil rural life, in a sorrowful house where there were no visitors, no amusements, nothing going on, nothing to see.

The sombre excitement of the arrival, and of the funeral, had for the first moment cast a veil over the gravest aspect of this seclusion. Half of Fife, as Miss Jean truly said, had shown their "respect" to the heir of Pitcomlie, and this fact had kept the stranger

from perceiving the dead calm that awaited him. It was on the Sunday afternoon that he first discovered what it was that he had fallen into. He had gone decorously to the parish church in the morning, with that amount of information respecting its simple forms and ceremonies which the moors and the grouse have communicated to the well-meaning and inquisitive English sportsman. And though we will not say that Mr. Fanshawe's mind was not visited by a momentary surprise that no part of the service was in Gaelic, he yet got through that part of the day well enough; and then he returned with the family to luncheon, a meal which was eaten almost in silence and at which he first fully realised the state of affairs.

The first Sunday is a painful moment for people in fresh grief. Mr. Heriot sat at the foot of his table, sombre, incapable of speech, with his head bent upon his breast, answering mechanically, but sometimes with flashes of painful irritation, when he was addressed. Marjory from time to time attempted to talk; but the tears would come into her eyes in the midst of a sentence, her lip would quiver, and the words

die away. Little Milly, with her hair more golden-bright than ever over her black frock, sat with great eyes opened upon the visitor, ready to cry every time that Marjory's voice faltered; and Uncle Charles, who sat beside the child, was checked by some irritable word from his brother whenever he began to speak. Thus Mr. Fanshawe found himself sadly out of place in the family sitting-room downstairs.

He went up into his room after lunch, and took down all the books out of the shelves, and looked at them one after another; then he made an excursion round the room, and looked at all the pictures. There were some prints of well-known pictures which he knew as well as his A B C, and there were some childish portraits of the Heriots, one of poor Tom, which he could recognise, and of another boy, and of a round-faced girl with curls, who, no doubt, was Marjory. This was very mild fare; he sat down at the window afterwards, with a copy of Milton, which was the liveliest reading he could find, and read a few lines of Comus, and looked out upon the sea. Soon

the monotonous chant of the waves attracted him, and he made his way through the silence and the sunshine downstairs, meeting no one, hearing no sound, feeling as if the house itself was dead or enchanted.

The weather was very fine, as warm as it often is in Scotland in June, though it was still only April. The Firth was blue as the sky above it, but of a deepened and darker tone; the rich brown cliffs stood out in strong relief with every inequality defined against that dazzling background. In the distance the opposite coast glimmered in the hazy brightness, marking itself by the white creamy edge of surf upon the rocks; and looming to the westward through a haze of mingled smoke and sunshine, stood Arthur's Seat, like a muffled sentinel watching over the half-apparent towers and roofs of Edinburgh. The scene was fine enough to have attracted even a less susceptible gazer; and Fanshawe, though he was a good-for-nothing, had an eye for beauty. He sat down upon the cliff beyond the old house of Pitcomlie, half-way down, where the

ses-side turf was all broken with bits of projecting rock. The salt spray dashed upon the red rocks underneath—whitest white and bluest blue, and russet brown of the richest tone, put in with all nature's indifference to crudity of colour, made up the foreground; and the distant line of the opposite coast, the vague shadow of Tantallon, the Bass rock, lying like a great pebble on the water, the great hill in the distance, with its ridges glimmering through the smoke of the unseen town, lent many a suggestion, human fulness of imagery, mystery and depth to the landscape.

Fanshawe was fully capable of appreciating the beauty of the scene; but when he had taken in all its beauty, another thought crept upon him which was very natural. The broad estuary before him was all but deserted; only a few distant ships nearer Leith broke the blue as it shaded off into the distance. The Comlie boats were all safe in harbour, the fishermen taking their Sabbath ease; one or two white sails were dropping down the western coast, disappearing round St. Abb's Head into the grey-blue horizon; but

nothing was visible nearer, except the high white cliffs of the May, the lighthouse island, which he had already watched from his window. Nothing to do! nothing that could even suggest a passing hope of amusement. After a while he looked upon the scene with dismay; it was as blank to him as a beautiful face in stone. Then he climbed to the top of the cliff, and looked out across the rich flat homely country. These well-laboured fields were a thousand times better for Mr. Heriot's rent-roll than if they had been picturesquely intersected by green lanes and waving hedgerows; but they were blank, blank to the soul of the strange visitor who found himself stranded in this noiseless place. Not a sound seemed to exist in that quiet country, except the murmur of the sea. Mr. Fanshawe said to himself spitefully that it was Scotch Sabbatarianism which prevented the very birds from singing, which chased away all rural sights and sounds, which swept the boats from the sea, and which demanded one monotonous level of dulness—dulness dead as death. And then this horrible question occurred to him:

Was he sure it would be any better to-morrow? He was not at all sure; he conjured up before him other scenes of rural life which he had known; stray visits to his relatives, which he had paid at long intervals, when he had found the decorations of the church the only amusement and a school-feast the only dissipation; and here, in grim Scotland, there were not even these simple elements of pleasure. Mr. Fanshawe's heart died within him as he gazed over that rich, well-ploughed country-side.

If it should occur to anyone that this mood was very inappropriate to the really sympathetic nature of one who had watched over Tom Heriot's sick-bed, and had grieved over, and fully felt the frightful blow which his death had given to the family so near at hand, we can but say in reply that even to the most sympathetic the impression produced by death is the one that is effaced most rapidly. Already Fanshawe had felt, with that impatience which is natural to humanity, that enough had been given to Tom. He could not and would not have expressed the sentiment in words; but it was a natural sentiment. Mr. Heriot's

heart-broken despondency, which was partly veiled and partly heightened by the irritability of grief, overawed the young man; but already he had begun to feel it hard upon him that Marjory, for instance, should refuse to be comforted. He himself felt healed of his momentary wound; and why did not she begin at least to allow herself to be healed also?

It seemed to Fanshawe, as it seems to all except the chief sufferers in every such bereavement, that it is churlish and almost fictitious to "give way"—and that the natural thing is to get better of your grief as you do of a headache, or, at least, not to annoy and worry other people, by letting them see that it is continually there. He had felt it very much at the time, but he had got over it; and it seemed natural to him that others should get over it also. And when he met Mr. Charles and Milly coming very solemnly hand in hand round the corner of the old house, their gravity seemed almost a personal affront to him.

"The child is but a child," he said to himself; "and the old fellow is only his uncle. Much my

uncle would care if I were to die! Really this is making too great a fuss," and a certain air of disapproval came into the look with which he met them. "Going to take a walk?" he said.

"We were going down to the foot of the cliff," said Mr. Charles. "This little thing is pale, and wants the air; will you come too? It is not very high, but the cliff is bold, and I am fond of the place. No scenery, you know, no scenery," said Mr. Charles, waving his hand towards the rocks with an air of protecting pride. "A poor thing, Sir, but mine own," was the sentiment with which he gazed at the brown headland, the angle of the coast upon which his paternal house was placed; "but to us who were born here, it has a beauty of its own."

"It has a great deal of beauty," said Fanshawe; "but of a desolate kind. To look out upon a sea without even a boat—"

"There are plenty of boats sometimes," said Mr. Charles, somewhat hastily; "you would not have the fishers out on the Sunday, unless when there's some special necessity?—a great haul of herring, or such like—good food that should not

be wasted, might excuse it; but without that there's no reason. There are plenty of ships in Leith Harbour, and lying beyond Inchkeith, as you would see when we crossed the Firth—"

As these words were said, Mr. Charles suddenly recollected how he had crossed the Firth last, a mourner bringing poor Tom to his burial; and he added hastily, "We were not thinking much of what we saw at such a sorrowful time; but still the ships were there."

"Is Mr. Heriot fond of yachting?" said Fanshawe, taking no notice of this dolorous conclusion. "A yacht would be a resource."

"The boys had once a boat," said Mr. Charles. "You must pardon us for our uncheerful ways. There is not a thing about but what is connected with his memory. They had a boat when they were quite young, before Charlie went to India. I am not fond of the sea myself; it's a very precarious pleasure; and to run the risk of your life for an hour's sail seems a want of sense and a waste of strength."

"Shouldn't you like to go to the May, Milly?"

said Fanshawe, pointing to the white cliffs of the island, which seemed on this clear day to be but a few fathoms off the shore, A sparkle of pleasure came into Milly's little face; her big blue eyes lighted up; the corners of her mouth, which had seemed permanently depressed, rose like the corners of an unbent bow.

"Oh!" she began; and then paused and looked at her uncle, and became melancholy once more.

Milly was like Fanshawe, she had had enough of the family grief; but she was too dutiful to break its bond.

"The May is not so near as it seems," said Mr. Charles. "It's very dangerous in some tides; the landing is bad. Our fishers themselves are far from fond of the May. And, altogether, our coast is not a coast for pleasure-sailing. There are accidents enough among those who cannot help themselves, poor fellows! Many a tragedy I have known on Comlie Shore."

"But if there is no yachting," said Fan-

shawe, with momentary forgetfulness of his good-breeding, "how do you get through the time — at least in Summer — if you spend it here?"

Mr. Charles looked at him with suppressed offence. A man who found Pitcomlie dull was to the Heriots the concentration of impertinence and bad taste. Little Milly looked up, too, with her wondering eyes. Milly did not know what to make of this man, who was not quite in harmony, she felt, with the surroundings, yet who made suggestions which were very delightful, and who had the melancholy and splendid distinction of being "poor Tom's friend." She was afraid he was going to be scolded, and was sympathetic; yet how could Uncle Charles scold a grown up gentleman, who was Tom's friend? Thus orderly age and dutiful childhood looked surprised at one who was beyond all the bonds familiar to them, and whose time and whose life seemed of so little importance to himself.

"My time seldom hangs heavy on my hands," said Mr. Charles. "If you live to

my age, you will learn that time is short—far too short for what a man has to do. I am sixty, and the days run through my hands like sea-sand. Many and many is the thing I have to put aside for want of time; and most likely I'll die with heaps of odds and ends left incomplete."

"I don't see any reason," said Fanshawe, in his levity; "at sixty it appears to me you have much more certainty of life before you than at half the age. A man who lives till sixty may surely live to a hundred if he pleases. By that time all the dangers must be over."

"And I suppose," said Mr. Charles, not quite pleased to hear his sixty years treated so lightly, "you hope to do as much yourself."

"I don't know," said the young man, laughing and shrugging his shoulders. "Seriously, do you think it's worth the while? I am more than half way, and it has not been so delightful. No; a short life and a merry one must be the best."

"That was poor Tom's idea," said Mr. Charles, with the look of a man who is improving the occasion.

His own feeling was that no sermon could have pointed a sharper moral. At the sound of Tom's name, little Milly began to cry; not that she knew very much of Tom, but the vague pain and sorrow which filled the house had made his name the emblem of everything that was melancholy and grievous to her. Milly's tears gave the last aggravation to Fanshawe's impatience.

"Poor Tom!" he cried; "he had a merry life. Better thirty years of that than a long, dull blank, with nothing particular in it. He thought so, and so should I. I don't like—forgive me for saying so—to think of poor Heriot as a warning. On the whole, I should not object to the same sort of end. Better that than to drink the cup to the dregs—"

"As I am doing, you mean," said Mr. Charles.

"No, indeed—far from that. As I should do, if such were to be my fate. It de-

pends, I suppose, upon the groove one gets into," said Fanshawe, with a short, uneasy laugh.

And then he began to talk hurriedly to Milly about the chances of a voyage to the May.

"I do not understand that young man," said Mr. Charles, privately, to Marjory. "May, my dear, you must try your hand. There is good about him. If there had not been good about him, he would never have done what he did for Tom. But he thinks Pitcomlie dull, and he thinks a long life undesirable. I should like to understand the lad; and as we all have cause to be grateful to him, I wish you would try your hand."

"If you wish it, uncle," said Marjory.

This was in the silence of the evening, when she sat by the window, looking out at the flush of sunset which still dyed all the western sky, and lit up the Firth with crimson and gold. Milly stood close by her, with an arm round her neck. The child had said her hymn, and discharged all her Sunday duties. She was

vaguely sad, because the others were sad—yet satisfied in that she had fulfilled all personal requirements; and over Marjory, too, a sense of quiet had stolen. The dead were in their graves and at rest; the living remained, with work, and tears, and dying all before them. She talked softly to Uncle Charles as the sunset lights faded, feeling an indescribable quiet come over her mind as the twilight came over the earth. Only Mr. Heriot sat alone in the library, with his head bent on his breast, doing nothing, reading nothing; thinking over the same thoughts for hours together. The old father felt that he had come to an end; but for the others it was not so: the pause in their lives was over, and existence had begun again.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning life began as usual for the saddened household. Breakfast, which had once been so lively a meal, passed over in comparative silence. Mr. Charles, indeed, did what he could to talk to the stranger, making conversation about the news and the newspapers, with a vague hope of enlivening the party.

"I daresay, as an Englishman, you don't know much about Scotch affairs, Mr. Fanshawe," he said. "If we were an ill-conditioned people like the Irish now, we might lead Parliament a pretty dance; but as we find it more to our advantage to keep quiet and mind our own business, nobody puts themselves out of the way."

"And then you are very well off, which Ireland

is not," said Fanshawe, who had Irish blood in his veins.

"I am not so sure about that. We have our grievances like other folk. Our affairs are thrust to the wall for every kind of nonsense. Who cares to come when it's a Scotch night, or when Scotch affairs are to be discussed? A handful of Scotch members—"

"It is like everything else," said Mr. Heriot, breaking in harshly; "even, if you come to that, who are our Scotch members? In the very next county one of our best men was turned out the other day, to make room for some English radical or other. They hire our houses, they shoot our moors, they clear the fish out of our rivers, they treat us like a hunting-ground. Our old habits are destroyed, our old families dying out—"

"Not so bad as that, not so bad as that," said Mr. Charles, soothingly. "You see, Mr. Fanshawe, we're proud, and we think a retired English tradesman, though an excellent man—a most excellent man, perhaps better than half the Lairds about—is out of his proper place in our old

castles. But still they bring money into the country, no doubt about that, and it's good for trade and all the rest of it. By the way, I see there's been a great match at St. Andrews—did you notice, Thomas?—with Tom Morris in it. We must take you to St. Andrews, Mr. Fanshawe, to see golf. You cannot say you know Scotland unless you know golf. Bless my life, what a long time it is since I have been there—not once all last season. What did you say, Thomas?—that is a most unusual thing for me."

"I said nothing," said Mr. Heriot. "Go to your golf, whatever happens, Charlie. Golf over your best friend's grave, if you like. What does it matter? He would never feel it, you may be sure."

Poor Mr. Charles and his attempts at conversation were thus cut short wheresoever he turned his steps.

"I mean no disrespect," he said, with a certain humility, looking anxiously at his brother, who sat throned in the irritability of his sorrow, strangely pale through the brownness of his country colour, or rather grey—with a veil over

his countenance such as had never been seen on it before. His heavy eyebrows were curved over the eyes, which shone out fiery and red from under them, red with sleeplessness, and nervous irritation, and unshed tears.

"It is nothing to me," he said, in a high-pitched unsteady voice, "nothing to me! Let them amuse themselves that can. I am glad of it. Has Charlie been written to yet—that is all I want to know."

"I wrote on Friday, papa."

"Ah! before the funeral," said Mr. Heriot, "to let him know what had happened. But I mean more than that. I mean that he should be written to, to come home. I want him home. Why should he stay out there now, risking his health and his children's lives? Write again, and say I want him home."

"Yes, papa," said Marjory, gently. "I said so then. I gave him all your messages. I said to come at once, as soon as Mrs. Charles could travel—"

"Confound Mrs. Charles! what do I care for Mrs. Charles?" cried the old man. And then he

paused, and turned with a curious attempt at a smile to Fanshawe. "You'll think I am a hot-headed old Turk, but you see how I am baffled by my family. I give a simple message, and it's lost in a hundred paraphrases. Mrs. Charles may come when she pleases. I want Charlie. Do you hear, May? Write again this very day, and say I want him home."

"Yes, papa, immediately, as soon as breakfast is over."

"I knew there would be something to wait for," said Mr. Heriot, rising up, impatiently. He was consumed by his grief as by a fire. The presence of any other individual, even those most dear to him, the sound of conversation, seemed to rouse into a kind of fury the smouldering heat in his soul. And when they dropped into silence he was still more impatient. "I fear I am a hindrance to conversation," he said, pushing away his chair from the table after a painful pause. "I'll *levo l'incomodo*, as the Italians say. If anyone wants me, I'm in the library. And mind that Charlie is written to without more delay."

So saying, he went out hastily, with a heavy step, which yet sounded uncertain upon the floor, as if it might stumble over anything. He waved his hand to Fanshawe, with a forced smile, as he disappeared. He met his darling Milly at the door—she whom he had never passed without a caress, and brushed by, taking no notice of her. Then he came back, and looked into the room sternly.

"See that there's no mistake about Charlie," he repeated.

Marjory made an ineffectual effort to restrain the tears which fell suddenly, in great drops, upon her sleeve. She, too, turned anxious apologetic looks upon the stranger.

"He never was like this before," she said. "Oh, don't think he is rude or unkind, Mr. Fanshawe. There never was anyone so good or so tender; but his heart is broken. He can think of nothing but poor Tom."

"And you'll write to Charlie?" said Mr. Charles. "I don't wonder at him being anxious. If you'll think what India is, and what the life is —a life made up of accidents, and fevers, and

everything that's deadly. The lad might be bitten by some venomous creature; some ill beast might fall foul of him; or he might catch the jungle fever, which they tell me is most dangerous—"

"But all this might have happened to him for years past, I suppose," said Fanshawe; "unless he went to India very recently. These dangers are not new."

"He was not the heir then!" said Mr. Charles very simply; and he too rose from the table. "Would you like to come and see my room, Mr. Fanshawe? There is not much to show, but I have some prints that are not just what you will see every day, and a curiosity or two; while Marjory writes her letters." And as he left the room he too looked back to say: "You'll write at once, May; you'll be very urgent? It will be good for us all to have Charlie at home."

"Oh, May!" cried little Milly, who did not remember her second brother; "why are they so anxious for Charlie to come home?"

"Who is anxious, Milly, besides papa and Uncle Charles?"

"Oh, the whole house!" said Milly. "Mrs. Simpson asks me every time she sees me; and old Fleming. 'Mr. Charlie must come home now!' they say. May, will you tell me why?"

"To fill Tom's place!" said Marjory, with an outburst of sudden tears. "Oh, my little Milly, that is what we do even when we love best. My father is breaking his heart for Tom; yet he wants Charlie to fill Tom's place."

"Nobody could ever fill *your* place, May," cried Milly; "I would never let them; dinna cry. I could cry too, for papa never minds me, never looks at me; and oh, he's so strange; the house is so strange! but May, so long as there is you—"

The little girl's arms clinging round her neck were a comfort to Marjory. Little Milly was wounded too; she had received that first lesson of her own unimportance, which is hard even for a child; she was half indignant, half angry even with "poor Tom," though she cried at the sound of his name—and very sore about Charlie, whom everybody wished for.

"They have May, and what do they want more?" this faithful little maiden said to herself. "When Tom was living we never saw him; and nobody ever thought of Charlie. Why do they make such a fuss now? when they have May!"

Fanshawe went with Mr. Charles to his room. After the scene of the morning he felt sadly out of place, an intruder into the family life. It seemed to him that he ought to go away; and only the day before he had felt the tediousness of the existence so much that any excuse for going away would have seemed a godsend; but yet, at the same time, he felt that he did not want to go. Why, he could not have told; he seemed to have been caught in the web of this family's life, to be waiting for some *dénouement*, or for some new turn in the story. He had known nothing of them two weeks before; yet now he was a member of the household, a spectator of the father's misery, of the effort of the family to right itself after this terrible blow. They seemed all to be playing their parts before him, while he was the judge chance had appointed to decide how

they all fulfilled their *rôle*. With this curious sensation in his mind he went over Mr. Charles's treasures—his prints, his cabinets of coins, his little collection of old jewellery, which he had ranged in boxes under glass covers. "Here is a necklace that I sometimes lend to May," the old man said, pointing out a delicate circlet in fine enamel, and the lightest fairy goldsmith's work. "It was brought to her great grandmother, Leddy Pitcomlie, from Rome, in the beginning of last century, and is said to have belonged to a line of great Italian beauties, whom I need not name. They're all written out on the case. I can recollect seeing it on the old Leddy's withered neck."

"Then you had a title in the family in those days?"

"No, no; no title! Leddy is the feminine of Laird, in old Scots—not Lady, mind, which has another meaning. This is a ring that belonged to Robert Hay in the end of the fifteenth century. We bear the yoke still in our arms, you see. Robert Hay, of the Erroll family, married the heiress of Pitcomlie—who was Marjory, like our

Marjory downstairs. It's a romance in its way. I have put together some of the facts in the shape of a kind of family history; but whether it will ever see the light of day—"

"Then you are an author, as well as an antiquary?" said Fanshawe; "and an art collector; and all sorts of learned things besides. What an impudent wretch I was to speak of dulness here!"

Mr. Charles blushed, and waved his hand in gentle deprecation.

"No more of an author than I am of an antiquary," he said; "a bit smattering here and there, that's all the knowledge I possess. As for my bits of family notes, I doubt if they would interest any but the family and connections. We have never had any notabilities among us; good, honest, ordinary folk; some soldiers that have done well in their day, but never very remarkable; and some clever women—that's been our speciality. You may see it in Marjory at the present moment. Clever women—I don't mean authoresses, or that kind of cattle, but real capable mothers of families,

that could guide their house and rule their children. We've been great for that. Here are some miniatures that, perhaps, will interest you; some very good, some bad enough, but all the same character, the same character running through them. There is one you would say was done for May, and it's her great-aunt I don't know how many times removed."

Thus the old man chattered, leading the stranger from one corner to another of his domain. Mr Charles's rooms were in the habitable corner of the old house of Pitcomlie, which was connected with the new house by a long corridor, a windy passage, with the garden on one side and the cliff on the other. One wing of the old building had been preserved in sufficient repair, and Mr. Charles's study occupied the round of the old tourelle, as well as part of the ancient front of the house. It was a large, cheerful room, with many windows, which he had fitted up according to his taste, and his taste was good. His writing-table stood in the round of the little tower commanding views up and down the Firth. All the won-

derful panorama on which Fanshawe had gazed with so much interest from the cliffs, unfolded itself round the old windows which were set in the half-circle of the tower. Between these windows Mr. Charles had placed frames of crimson velvet, set with miniatures, with rare old prints, and with small but exquisite scraps of sketches. Only a trained eye, indeed, could have divined the amount of modest wealth contained upon these; delightful faces, lovely little scraps of scenery, gems which nothing could replace, though to the ignorant they seemed simple enough.

Fanshawe felt himself grow smaller and smaller as he looked. After all, this was not the dull and level blank of existence he had supposed. This homely old man, with his Scotch accent, changed under his eyes; he became something a great deal more lofty and elevated than Mr. Charles. In his compunction and shame, the young man went as far too high in his second estimate as he had been too low in his first. As for Mr. Charles, this change gave

him a simple satisfaction which it was delightful to behold.

"You see, after all, there are some things worth looking at in Pitcomlie," he said. "It is not such a humdrum house, after all, though it stands in a county so little interesting as comfortable Fife."

"Nothing could have made it a humdrum house," said the penitent. He was not thinking of Mr. Charles's pictures: he was thinking of—something else.

Just then an unexpected summons came to the door.

"Miss Heriot's compliments, and would the gentleman step over to the north room?" the maid said, who waited, curtseying, to show the way.

Mr. Charles's countenance clouded over.

"That's poor Tom's room," he said. "I'll go with the gentleman myself—and yet, no; on second thoughts I'll not go. You two may have something to consult about, that I should not meddle with; or Marjory may think there is something. Go, as she has sent for you, Mr.

Fanshawe; you can come back to me another time."

With a curious little thrill of interest, Fanshawe went, threading the turret staircase down from Mr. Charles's rooms, and the windy passages, wondering what she could want with him. Marjory received him in a room of a very different description. It was in the back of the house, looking across the gardens to the level line of the ploughed land, and the low hills on the horizon. It was a long, narrow room, with a door opening from each end; and its decorations were of a kind as different from Mr. Charles's study as was its form. On the walls hung two crossed swords, some old guns carefully arranged according to their antiquity, a collection of whips, fishing-rods, clubs for playing golf—worn out traces of a boyhood not yet so very long departed. In one corner was a bookcase, full of old classics, thumbed and worn, the school-books of the two boys whose progress in polite letters Pitcomlie had once been so proud of. The pictures on the walls were of the most heterogeneous character; lan-

guishing French "Etudes" in chalk, were mingled with sporting subjects, heads of dogs, portraits of sleek race-horses led by sleeker grooms, and one staring view of Pitcomlie, painted in water-colours, with very lively greens and blues, and signed "Ch. Hay-Heriot," in bold boyish characters.

No contrast could have been greater than this mass of incongruous elements, seen after the careful collection of Mr. Charles; and yet this, too, was not without its attraction. It looked like the chaos of a boy's mind, a hopeless yet innocent confusion; all sorts of discordant things connected together by the sweet atmosphere of youth and possibility, out of which all harmonies might come. In the midst of this schoolboy chamber sat Marjory. She had a writing-case placed before her on a table, the key of which she held in her hand. Fanshawe recognised it at once. It was one which Tom had used constantly, which he had carried about with him everywhere. Tom's sister looked up at him with a wistful and anxious glance.

"Mr. Fanshawe," she said, "this has been brought to me to open. My father cannot bear to look at anything, and I—I feel as if we had no right to search into his secrets. It seems dishonourable, when he cannot defend himself—when he is in our power."

Fanshawe went round to Marjory's side, and took into his own the hand which, half unconsciously, she held out, appealing to him, and touched the fingers with his lips. Her eyes were full of tears, and the look she turned to him, asking for counsel and sympathy, went to his very heart. A slight colour came to her face at this answer to her appeal; but Marjory was not vain, and took it in no other light than as an impulse of sympathy.

"Must I do it?" she asked.

"Is there any reason why? is it necessary? must *you* do it?" he asked. "Miss Heriot, your brother was but a man like others. There may be things he would not have had you see."

Once more Marjory blushed; but this time more

hotly. She drooped her head not to look at him.

"That is what I thought," she said, very low. Then after a pause, she looked up suddenly in his face. "Mr. Fanshawe, you were his friend; you heard what he said about something to tell me. He thanked God at the last that he had told me, though he had not, you are aware. Do you know what it was?"

"No." It was a relief unspeakable to him to be able to say this. "I know none of his secrets—if he had any. So far as I am aware, he was irreproachable. I knew nothing of him which you might not have known."

"Thanks!" she said, with a smile, once more holding out her hand. How grateful she was to him for knowing nothing! "Do you think, if I keep it by me, to refer to in case of need—do you think that would do?"

"Or your uncle might do it," said Fanshawe.

To his astonishment, she shrank from this suggestion.

"Uncle Charles is very good and kind; but he would be hard upon poor Tom—he was always hard upon him. I must do it, if it has to be done. Must it be done? I am so unwilling to do it, that I cannot trust my own judgment. Oh! why cannot our little treasures, our secrets, our mysteries, be buried with us in our graves?"

"He may have left a will—instructions—something that concerns others," said Fanshawe, hesitating.

Miss Heriot was not perfect, or an angelical woman. She almost turned her back upon him as she answered coldly,

"Thanks; you seem to think it necessary. I will not trouble you further, Mr. Fanshawe. I am much obliged to you for your advice."

"What else could I say?" poor Fanshawe asked himself, as he retired. "What the deuce have I done? She talks as if it was my fault. I did not kill Tom Heriot, nor lock up his secrets in his despatch box. I hope, though, she won't find anything to shock her. What do the people

here mean by leaving all this to her? They give her everything to do. By Jove! if it was me she would find the difference. I should be her slave. She should do just what she liked, and so would I. I wonder if she'd like it? I mean not me, but the kind of thing—to be served instead of serving, to be kept from trouble instead of being bothered by everybody. Just for the fun of the thing I should like to know."

At this stage of his thoughts, Mr. Fanshawe being outside on the platform before the house, lighted his cigar; and then he strolled down the cliff to the rocks, where he wandered about till the hour of luncheon.

"I suppose it's best as it is," he said to himself, as he clambered up again at the sound of the bell. Such a sentiment is perhaps less contented, less satisfactory than it looks. "I suppose it's best as it is!" Certainly there was a certain ruefulness in the countenance with which it was said.

CHAPTER X.

Mr. Heriot did not come to luncheon. A tray carefully piled with everything that old Fleming could think of to tempt his master's appetite was carried to him in the library; but before the rest of the party had left the table, Fleming came back disconsolate, bearing his tray untouched.

"In case ye shouldna believe me, I've brought it back, Miss Marjory," he said, with an injured air, approaching the young mistress of the house. "Look at it with your ain e'en, and maybe then ye'll believe me. No a thing tasted, no more nor he did yesterday, and me sent away for an auld bletherin' scoondrel. An auld bletherin' scoondrel! Man and boy I've been in the house o'

Pitcomlie forty years, and it's the first time such a name was ever applied to me."

"Fleming, you must not mind," said Marjory. "My father did not mean it. It was his grief that spoke, and not he."

"Nae doubt ye ken better than me, Miss Marjory; the bairns we've brought up on our knees are aye wiser than us old folk; but he means *that*, I suppose?" said old Fleming, holding up his tray triumphantly. "And what kind of a meaning is that for the father of a family? No to take his good food that's been prepared wi' a' the care and pains of a clean and Christian woman, that sud have been accepted wi' a grace and eaten with thanksgiving. When I mind the luncheons the Laird used to eat, the good dinners he made, the fine nat'rel appetite!" cried Fleming, almost with tears in his eyes, holding up his tray as an eloquent witness of his case, "and now to be sent away with a flea in my lug for a bletherin' scoondrel,—because I was fain to see him eat a morsel of wholesome meat!"

"Go away to your pantry, Sir, and say no more about it," said Mr. Charles, authoritatively.

"Miss Marjory has plenty to put up with, without your nonsense. Your father, my dear, has been in the house for days together. He has not so much as taken a walk, he that was always afoot. That's the reason why he cannot eat; for my part, I am not surprised. He'll be better, I hope, when Charlie comes back."

"I would get the doctor," said Fleming, with stout self-assertion. "Mr. Charlie may be kept back by ill winds, or many a thing beside. I would have the doctor if it was me."

Fanshawe looked at this scene with mingled amusement and surprise; but though Mr. Charles stood up in defence of his niece, neither of them thought it strange that the old butler should have his word to say. The old man even emitted extraordinary murmurs, which were almost like groans, as he continued his attendance at table.

"I've seen death in the house afore. I've seen plenty of sore trouble; but I never saw the Laird as he is now. Waes me! waes me!" said Fleming; and the conversation,

such as it was, was interrupted by this monologue.

They all went into the drawing-room together, glad to escape from it. Mr. Charles took his three-cornered seat by the fire, and his newspaper, which he had left lying upon it. Marjory seated herself at the writing-table in the bow window. They had their natural occupations, the things they did habitually every day; but as for Fanshawe, he had no occupation to turn to. He turned over all the books on the tables, and then he went and stood at the window. The weather had changed since yesterday, which was much too bright to last. It was a true Spring day on the East coast, with a white mist closing in over land and sea, and a chill wind blowing. Was he to spend that whole long afternoon gazing at the tumbling, leaden waves, and the choking white vapour that lay heavy like a coverlet over them, and clung to the edges of the cliff like a fringe of woolly whiteness, and shut out both earth and sky?

Just then Mr. Heriot put in his head, and asked sharply,

"Have you written to Charlie?"

"Yes, papa," said Marjory, with a little start; and a minute after, Fanshawe, at the window, saw the old man go out, with his head upon his breast, to the misty cliff that lay before the windows.

He stood still there for some moments, with his tall figure relieved against the forlorn blackness of the waves and the woolly mist, his white hair and the skirts of his coat blowing in the wind; and then he took the rocky path down the side of the cliff, which led to the beach. It seemed to be natural that he should choose such a day to go abroad in, a hopeless day, when the sun and the light were obscured, when the wind searched to the marrow of the bones, and the mist crept into the throat, and the sea moaned and complained among its rocks.

Fanshawe stood and watched him as long as he could see him. The very air and water seemed to sigh "Waes me!" like the old serving-man who loved the house.

"Mr. Fanshawe," said Marjory, from the recess,

"is there anything to be done for you? We are dull, and we cannot help it. None of us are good for anything. I should like to ask you to walk with us; but it is an easterly haar, and that is bad on our coast; and riding would be still worse; and it is too late, even if the weather were not so bad, to go to St. Andrews, as Uncle Charles proposed—"

"Never mind me," said Fanshawe, with some shame. "You must think me a man of few resources, and so, I fear, I am. I am good for nothing. I have got out of the way of reading. It is a horrible confession, but it is true. The only thing that suggests itself to me on such a day is, if not to walk, yet to talk."

"Let us talk, then," said Marjory, closing the blotting-book in which she had been writing her letters.

She said it, he thought, with a sort of half contempt, as if this insignificant occupation of talk was a kind of idleness, and beneath her ordinary activity; and then, as was natural after

such a conclusion had been come to, a dead silence supervened. Mr. Fanshawe broke it with a laugh.

"I fear you despise talking," he said; "and conversation is a thing which cannot be done of *malice prepense*. May we have some music instead? There is music enough there in your case to last a lifetime, much less an afternoon."

"Music!" said Marjory, somewhat startled. "To be sure," she added, with a smile, "music is not merry-making, as our poor folk fancy. It does not need to be the voice of mirth; and now you suggest it, there are few things that would express one's feelings so well—the forlorn, confused, oppressed—" She paused, with tears rising, which got into her throat and her eyes, and stifled her words. "But I must not, Mr. Fanshawe. It would shock everybody. My poor father would think me mad, and I cannot tell what the servants would say. It would seem to them the very height of heartlessness."

"No, no," said Mr. Charles, from his corner;

"no, May, my dear; no music. I could not put up with that."

Fanshawe turned away, dismayed. He felt himself the most profane, secular, troublesome intruder. Poor Tom's shadow seemed to stop up all the ordinary currents of life, and create a fictitious existence, full of impossible laws of its own for the mourners. Little Milly sat in a corner, reading—not her favourite stories, or the fairy tales which had been her constant companions, but a good book about a little boy who died in the odour of sanctity. She was reading it with the corners of her mouth turned down, and every soft, wavy line about her stilled into angles and gravity.

Fanshawe went and sat down by her, and began to talk of that voyage, which he had once proposed, to the Isle of May. He led the child so far out of herself, that at the end of five minutes she laughed, a sound which frightened her to death, and which made both her uncle and her sister raise their eyes, as if something dreadful had happened. May said nothing, and her eyes, tearful though they were, smiled at the little creature;

but Mr. Charles said in a voice which was harsh for him :—

"You forget that this is a house of mourning."

Poor Milly cried a little by way of expiating that weakness of nature, and relapsed into her good book; but Fanshawe could not cry, and had no good book to retire into. He yawned visibly, as he lay back in his low chair and contemplated his companions. He was a good-for-nothing; he had no letters to write, no studies to carry on. When he was not amused or occupied, he yawned. What else was there to do?

There is nothing which more piques a woman than this frank and unblushing *ennui*, when it makes itself visible within reach of her. Marjory felt half-insulted, half-stimulated to exertion.

"Is there nothing we can show Mr. Fanshawe?" she said, in a tone of semi-irritation. "I fear our pictures are only family-portraits, and we possess nothing that is curious. Uncle Charles has all the rarities in the house, and

those you have seen already. Should you like to go over the old hall—the ruinous part? There is not much to see."

"I should like it very much," said Fanshawe.

He did not care two straws about the old ruined Manor-house; but the thought of a *tête-à-tête* with May was pleasant to him, partly because of the vague attraction which a handsome young woman has for a young man, and partly because he was curious about her individually. She was a new species to him; he had not made her out, and the study was an agreeable kind of study. With a slight flush of impatience on her face, she had risen to lead the way; and he, secretly delighted, but perfectly demure and serious, was following, when all his satisfaction was suddenly turned into discomfiture. The door opened, and, with a tone of solemnity, Fleming entered and announced,

"Doctor and Mistress Murray."

When he had solemnly pronounced the names, giving full weight to every syllable, the old servant ranged himself by the wall, to see the

effect of his announcement; he watched complacently while the visitors entered after him in panoply of woe, with looks wrought up to the requisite pitch of sympathetic solemnity. It was, as Fleming said afterwards, as good as a sermon to see the Doctor. He had come to condole, and he was fully prepared to do so. Resignation and submission—that comfortable resignation which can support with so much dignity the losses of others—was in every fold of his dress, in the lines of his composed countenance, decently sad, but not gloomy, as became a man who sorrowed not without hope. To old Fleming, the Minister's aspect was a thorough enjoyment. It was the sort of thing which was befitting to a house of mourning; not the hot grief which refused to be comforted, and abjured food and carnal consolation, like that passion of sorrow which possessed his master; but a legitimate and subdued sentiment, which fulfilled all proprieties, and was an example to all beholders.

Mrs. Murray was not so satisfactory. She came in crying softly, and took Marjory into her

arms, who—thus caught on the very verge of going out, and making an effort after amusement, was confused, as if she had been doing something amiss.

"My poor Marjory! my poor bairn!" said Mrs. Murray; while May, though the tears started from her eyes, felt as if she must cry out in self-accusation, and confess that for that moment she had not been thinking of Tom.

Then they all sat down in a circle, of which Dr. Murray was the centre. Mr. Charles had shuffled hastily out of his fireside corner, and had come forward to shake hands, with a certain solemn *empressement*, which was the proper way in which members of the family should receive such a visit. Fanshawe stole away behind backs, and sat down again by little Milly; but Milly, with a dreadful recollection of that laugh, avoided him, and fixed her eyes upon the Minister—for what would happen if, under sore press of temptation, she was to make such a terrible mistake again?

"And how is your father, Miss Marjory?" said the Doctor; "far from well, I fear? He had

a shaken look yesterday at church that grieved my heart to see. No doubt it is a great affliction, a very sore stroke from the Almighty; but we must remember that it is the Almighty, and that it is not our place to repine."

"No doubt, no doubt; that is true," said Mr. Charles, acquiescing solemnly.

It was a thing incumbent on him in his representative position as the only man of the house.

"I don't think my father means to repine," said Marjory. "His heart is just broken; he never thought of it—never expected such a thing as that he should live, and poor Tom be taken away!"

"And the heir, too," said the Doctor. "The ways of the Lord are very inscrutable. Just those lives that seem to us most valuable are taken. When I look round upon the world," added Dr. Murray, "and see how many people are struck just in the way that was most unexpected, most unlikely! But he has other children left, and you must do what you can to keep him from brooding. My dear Miss Marjory, a great deal is in your hands."

"I can do so little," said Marjory, with tears. "My poor father! his heart is broken. There does not seem anything that we can do."

"You must tell him to be resigned," said Dr. Murray. "I am very sorry that he is out. I should have been glad if I had been able to speak a word of comfort to my old friend and respected heritor. You must remind him how much we have all to bear. Not one of us is without his cross. Sometimes it falls heavier on one than on another. It is his turn to-day, and it may be ours to-morrow; but none of us escape. The only one thing certain is that there must have been need of it. This mysterious and terrible dispensation has not been sent without some good end."

"No doubt, no doubt; it must be for a good purpose," said Mr. Charles.

"I cannot say how sorry I am that Mr. Heriot is not in," continued the Doctor. "I might have timed my visit differently. I had not thought it likely that he would be well enough to go out."

"He has gone down to the rocks," said Marjory,

feeling that her father was put on his defence. "It is not a day to tempt any one. I think the moaning of the sea soothes him. He cannot bear conversation; we are none of us capable of much—"

"My poor child! as if anything was to be expected," said kind Mrs. Murray, drawing her aside. "I would not even have had the Doctor come so soon. I thought I might have come myself first, to give you a kiss, my dear. Oh! May, I know what it is! Tell your father my heart just bleeds for him. I'm glad he's out to take the air, though it's a dreary, dreary day; but, perhaps, in grief like his, a dreary day is the best. When it's bright, Nature seems to have no heart. The Doctor thought it was his duty to come, though it's so soon. And, my dear, tell me, has any change been thought of? what are you going to do?"

"We have sent for Charlie; that is all. What other change is there possible? I hope perhaps my father may take some comfort when Charlie comes home."

"Now that is just what I said," said Mrs.

Murray, growing a little more cheerful on this argument. "Doctor, I told you they would send for Charlie. He should be home now with his bairns, to bring them up in their own country; and India's a weary place for children. You can never be happy about them. I am looking for my Mary's two eldest, poor things! It will break their mother's heart to part with them; but what can she do? Oh, yes, my dear; it will be a great happiness to me; but I cannot expect you to take any interest in that, and you in such trouble. Miss Jean is coming to-morrow to pay you her visit, May. I will say nothing to her about Charles; she will like best to hear that from you herself."

"It is quite the right thing to do," said the Doctor; "and we may be thankful that your brother Charles has always been very steady, and a married man, and all that. He will be a great comfort to you all, and a help to his father about the estate. Your father has got a great shake, Miss Marjory, and I doubt if he will ever be as strong to go about as he has been. Charles's arrival is the very best thing that could happen.

Always a steady lad, and able to take his part in the management of the property. He will be a comfort to you all."

It was on Marjory's lips to say that she wanted no comfort, and that the substitution of one brother for another gave her, on the contrary, an additional pang; but she restrained herself, and acquiesced silently, while Mr. Charles answered,

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt. Charlie will be a comfort when he comes."

And then Marjory was once more folded in Mrs. Murray's kind arms, and the doctor, with concentrated woe in his face, laid his hand upon her shoulder, and exhorted her to be resigned, as he took his leave. As the door opened, Fleming's voice was heard exhorting another visitor to enter.

"Come in, sir, come this way," said Fleming.

And Fanshawe, who stood in the recess of the bow window, watching the whole proceedings, saw a young man enter shyly and with reluctance, whose appearance somehow entirely

changed the placid feelings with which he had watched the Minister and the Minister's wife. The new comer came up to Marjory with eager, though hesitating, steps; he took her hand and held it, bowing over it so deeply that the spectator asked himself, in scorn, whether the fellow meant to kiss it. He had kissed that same hand himself in respect and sympathy not very long before; but the presumption of the stranger struck him as something inexcusable.

The visitor was a slim young man, with large dark eyes, and that "interesting" look which women are said to admire, and which men regard with savage scorn. Fanshawe was not handsome himself; his eyes were of no particular colour, and he was more muscular than interesting. Therefore his scorn was intensified. Instinctive dislike and enmity filled his mind, when he saw young Hepburn's head bent so low over Marjory's hand.

"I thought I might come to ask," said Hepburn, hurriedly. "I did not hope to see you. I came in only because Fleming insisted, without any wish to thrust myself—Miss Heriot, you will be

good and kind, as you always are. You got my note?"

She did not sit down, but received her visitor standing, which was a kind of satisfaction to the looker-on.

"Yes. I got your note. It is very kind, very friendly of you—"

"Oh, hush! don't say so. Kind of me! But if you will make use of me—anyhow, Miss Heriot! only that I may feel I am doing something. Let me run errands, write letters—anything. What is the use of my life but for your service?" said the young man, in his emotion and excitement.

Fanshawe, fortunately, did not hear these last words.

"Thanks," said Marjory, with a cold yet gentle graciousness. The word sounded to the one as if it had come out of the snows of the Arctic region; but to the other, the distant spectator, it sounded warm and sweet. "We do not require any help, Mr. Hepburn. All that we wished has been done. Everybody has been very kind. How can I thank you? We have felt the kindness of our friends to the bottom of our hearts."

"How can you speak of kindness? There are some who would give anything in the world to take a single burden from you. You will think of me, then—as the greatest favour, Miss Heriot—if there is anything — anything you think me worthy to do? That is all. I will not say another word except that my whole heart is with you in your grief. I can think of nothing else."

"Nay," said Marjory, drawing back a step like a queen, as she gave him her hand again. "You are too kind to say so."

"Confound these old friends!" Fanshawe said to himself, thinking this double hand-shaking a quite undue and unnecessary familiarity, while poor young Hepburn withdrew, feeling as if she had spoken to him from the top of a mountain—from some chill and impassable distance. "My own fault for intruding so soon," he said to himself, sadly, as he went away.

Thus the brief interview made a totally different impression upon two persons present. Hepburn had not noticed Fanshawe, had scarcely

seen, indeed, that there was any one in the room but Marjory herself.

"Is that Johnnie Hepburn?" said Uncle Charles, as he went away. "What a nice-looking young fellow the boy has grown."

"He looks like a Johnnie," said Fanshawe, with a laugh.

It was unpardonably impertinent, he felt, the next moment; but his feelings demanded some relief.

"He is very good and very kind," said Marjory, majestically, casting a look upon him which avenged poor Johnnie. Fanshawe grew meek as a child in a moment, and begged pardon as humbly as Milly herself could have done.

"And now we can go to the old house," he said, going after her with intense satisfaction, as she went to the door.

"Not now; I am too tired. I cannot do more to-day," said Marjory; and he heard the sound of a low sob as she escaped, little Milly rushing after her.

"It is all that fellow's fault," was Fanshawe's comment, as he went back to his bow-window,

and sat down and looked out disconsolately upon the leaden sea and the white choking mist. What was it to him whose fault it was? But Marjory Heriot was the only thing he had to interest him, and he took a great interest in all that affected her—for the moment at least.

CHAPTER XI.

MARJORY, I am sorry to say, thought nothing at all of the interest she had excited; she was not so much as conscious of it; and she did not even think of Fanshawe, who was rather an embarrassment than a comfort to the household. She had been sinking into a certain calm, close as she still was to the great misfortune which had befallen her family; but time travels very quickly at such moments, and it already seemed ages to her since she entered poor Tom's sick-chamber, and since she saw him die. She had been quieted by the calm of the silent Sunday after the funeral; but her visitors had driven all her quiet away. When the Minister had bidden her to be resigned, she had felt a wild impatience

fill her mind; she hastened to her own room, dismissing Milly, and then threw herself upon her sofa, and wept as a child weeps. It was sorrow, but it was not such sorrow as Marjory was capable of feeling. Her brother had been dear to her; but he was not all in all to her. Impatience, a painful sense of the narrowness of human sympathy, and the imperfection of human good sense, mingled, in this little outburst, with natural grief, and that painful pity with which, wherever no deep religious sense of gain comes in, the death of a young man cut off in his prime must be regarded.

Marjory's mind was not one of those which are apt to speculate upon the possibilities of damnation; but on the other hand, it was impossible to think of poor Tom as an evangelical conqueror, a saint-like personage in robes of white and crown of glory. He could not have reached that height, poor fellow! and therefore the ache of pity with which his sister thought of his early severance from all he had cared for, was very sore and painful. The human comparison seemed to add an edge of sharper pain to grief. His companions

lived and flourished—and he was gone. They had their easy mornings, their gay evenings, their sports and amusements, and enjoyed them all with light hearts. In the papers that very day, had been an announcement of the marriage of one of them—and Tom was dead!

Marjory's heart contracted with a pang of pain, as though some gigantic hand had crushed it. She thought it was grief, but it was something more than simple grief. Under the sway of this feeling she went to the table upon which his desk had been placed, and seated herself once more before it. The last time she had done so—that time when she had ineffectually questioned Fanshawe—she had felt herself shrink from the painful task, and had not really made any investigation into poor Tom's secrets. Now she opened the desk with her eyes full of tears for him, with that painful contraction at her heart.

There is nothing in the world so sad as thus to open some human creature's most cherished repositories, when the poor soul is gone, and can guard his foolishness no more. How trivial half the things are! a fourth part of them, at least,

thrown there in that light-hearted inadvertence which death makes to appear like a solemn intention, puzzling the survivors with its want of meaning. Why did he keep this or that? an unimportant invitation, a letter about nothing at all, an empty envelope, a memorandum about a race, a receipt for physic for a horse. What a curious mixture of awe and astonishment was in her as she gathered them together! They were good for nothing but the waste-basket; and yet the fact that Tom had treasured them gave the worthless scraps an interest. She cleared away a mass of these remains of his life. There is a little hill near Rome which is made, they say, of fragments of crockery, and such other valueless relics of an ended existence; but ah me! when one remembers what sacred spot lies there under the cypress, in the shadow of Testaccio, how solemn and sacred does that mound of classic rubbish become to us! Something of the same effect was wrought upon Marjory by the sight of poor Tom's rubbish, now that death had made it mysterious. She tried hard to get some meaning out of it, and failing in that, put it aside in a

pile, with a certainty that it must be her perceptions which were in fault. Was there nothing to be found but these miserable débris, that had so little signification? There were bills besides, and letters about bills; letters which Marjory knew would be very little welcome to her father. How was she to tell him of them? Tom, poor fellow, had become as a god, as an angel to his father, since his life ended; and to plunge him back again into the old atmosphere of debt and promises to pay—how miserable it would be! She made these too up into a parcel by themselves with a sense of humiliation. Was this all that was left of Tom? His bills; and those frivolous scraps that meant nothing—that had no human value, that threw no light upon his existence. Was it worth while for a man to have been born, to have lived and died, for nothing better than that? Marjory felt that even ill-doing would have been better than no doing at all; and grew scornful almost of her own fears. She had felt as if she were about to thrust herself into Tom's secrets—and lo! Tom had no secrets at all.

These thoughts were in her mind, filling her

with a kind of angry shame, when she picked up, out of a corner, a letter, badly folded and badly written; but put away, it was evident, with some care. It had no envelope or address. The paper was very finely glazed and gilt-edged; but it was folded awry, and the handwriting was quite unformed. "No doubt a letter from his groom," Marjory said to herself, with a painful sense of the unsatisfactory character of Tom's correspondences; but when she had read the first few lines, her countenance changed. She paused —she looked at the signature. A momentary look of haughty displeasure and disgust crossed her face, and she let the letter drop, as if with the intention of tossing it from her; but on second thoughts she changed her mind. She lifted it once more gingerly, as if it were something which might stain the white fingers in which she held it, and with a deep and painful blush began again to read. I do not think there was anything in the letter to call that blush to Marjory's cheek; but she had the same prejudices as other women, and was deeply susceptible to everything that felt like shame. The writing was not abso-

lutely coarse—it was like the writing of a child, unformed and uncertain, written upon ruled lines, which had been partially rubbed out; but the sentiments were not those of a child. This was what, with a proud sense of humiliation, keen disgust and indignation, Marjory read—all her natural prejudices starting into warmest life.

"I cannot write to you in the way you tell me—I would think shame. Oh, Sir, you must not expect much from a poor lass that never has learned anything, till I tried to do it, to please you. There is nothing I would not do to please you. Ye've been very kind to me, Mr. Heriot, like a good man. And, eh! I hope I'll make a good wife, if I could but learn quicker, no to be a shame to you. Sorry, sorry I am that I did not take more advantage of the schule as I might have done—for, oh! Mr. Heriot, them that say 'your face is your fortune,' say little that is pleasant to hear. When I think whiles that it's but for my face ye fancied me; and that, maybe, if any accident happened—if I lost my colour, or my teeth, or what not, ye would think of me

nae mair! Oh, Sir, dinna be like that! If *you* were blind and cripplit, and pock-markit, like old John in the clachan, I would but think the more of you. And you that are a gentleman, Mr. Heriot, and know everything, you should not be less than poor me; for although I am little to set store by, and no a scholar, nor instructed, I'm better than my face, which is just a bit of painted flesh, as the Minister says. If I thought you cared for me, and no just *it*—oh, but I would be happy! I have a great deal to say, but I cannot tell how to say it. I am feared for making you think me more ignorant than ever. My heart's full, full; but I think shame to say all that's in it; you know, Sir, better than I can tell you. When will you come back? oh! when will ye come back? I'm weary of wishing and wishing. My sister Agnes will not go to her place, thinking ye might not like it. John Ogilvy, my first cousin, the son of Uncle John, that is the smith, is away to the College to learn to be a Minister. I do not mind anything else you would like to hear; but that I'm wearying, wearying sore, and aye, the longer the time is,

the mair wearying to see my" (here there were a great many erasures—one word written over another till it was impossible to make out what they had been—until it finished in the clearly written words) "my Mr. Heriot again.

"Your ain and your very ain, oh dear, dear Sir,

"ISABELL."

Marjory read this innocent and natural letter with a buzzing of excited pulses in her ears, and a blaze of hot colour in her face. The mere fact that it was a letter from a woman moved her (naturally) as no other kind of secret could have done. Indeed what other kind of secret would have been worth considering in comparison? She drew a long breath when she had read it. Her face was scarlet, as if the shame (if shame there was) had been her own. And it was hardly possible for her, at least for the first moment, to realise that there might be no shame in it. To have felt so, would have been such a triumph over prejudice and over natural feeling as Marjory was not equal to.

The bad writing, the bad spelling, the peasant dialect, struck her more strongly than the sentiments did. They seemed to imply vice—vice which to a young and pure-minded woman is the same as crime—nay, is the worst kind of crime. There was then, after all, a mystery in Tom's life, and here it was; a vulgar degrading mystery—the kind of horror which people say is so common in the lives of young men, a suggestion which Marjory loathed as every woman ought to loath it. It filled her with disgust of Tom and of all men.

She threw the paper out of her hand with a cry of indignant wrath, and then slowly, reluctantly, took it up again, unable to resist the fascination. The second time a different impression was made upon her mind. "I'll make a good wife"—what did that mean? Marjory pondered over it with excitement, which was not calmed down by this new discovery. Had he really meant—was it possible he could have intended to make the writer of this letter his wife? His sister thrilled all over with an indignant movement of horror, Yes, I do not know

how to excuse it—but Marjory, who had been blazing hot with shame at the idea of a disreputable connection on her brother's part, felt a shiver of horror go over her at the thought that there might be no shame in it, that his mind might be honourable and his love pure, that he might have intended this woman, this peasant, this Isabel, to be her sister and his wife. Her eyes fixed on those words with a painful stare. "Good heavens, his wife!" and under her breath, in her throat, Marjory murmured, "Thank God!" Thank God for what? that Tom was dead? that he had not lived to carry that intention out? was this what she meant? She stopped short in absolute dismay, when her reason perceived to what length instinct and impulse had carried her.

She hid her burning face in her hands. She fell a-weeping: tears more poignant and real than any she had yet shed for Tom. Her mind turned against itself, lost in that misery of moral confusion which makes the problem of life so doubly bitter. She dared not say to herself that the least honourable explanation was

the least terrible; but her thoughts went on in spite of her, against her will, shaping before her a picture of what might have been. This peasant woman in Pitcomlie, mistress of everything, the successor of all the Heriot ladies, filling her own mother's place, Marjory's sister, Milly's guardian placed on the same level with them, almost superior to them—good heavens! She disowned the thoughts that thus struggled in her. She tried to drive them from her mind, to ignore them, to introduce other feelings in their place, and cried, and hid her face and could not. God had stepped in and preserved the house from this degradation; He had saved them perhaps at the last moment. And things being as they were, and poor Tom doomed anyhow, God be thanked, might not she say it? deep down where nobody could hear, in the depths of her heart.

Marjory was breathless after this battle with her thoughts; she dragged herself out of it she scarcely knew how, frightened to think what she had been thinking, scared as a man is who has travelled in the dark, when morning shows him the precipices he has passed—or like a drowning

man who has been struggling with the angry waves, she crept forth upon dry land, and lay there exhausted, trying not to think, hearing the great sea-rollers break beneath, too low to harm her. It seemed to her that she had passed through a terrible conflict, and it made her heart sick to think that this perhaps was the secret which Tom had intended to tell her. Perhaps he had meant to commend the girl to her care, to claim her affection and sympathy; and for the moment she felt fiercely glad that he had not done so, that she was bound by no sort of visible or invisible tie to this unknown Isabell. Yes, she was glad he had not lived to tell that secret, glad he had been stopped from disgracing the family. It hardly seemed to her, for the moment, that the exemption of the house from so great a shame and injury by Tom's death, was too great a thing to have been done by Providence for the sake of the Heriots. She seemed no longer sorry, no longer a mourner, but glad and comforted to think that God had stepped in and stopped it, perhaps, at the last moment when there was no time to lose.

But it was with an agitated heart, and a countenance out of which she could not altogether banish her excitement, that she went down stairs, when old Fleming rang that inevitable bell for dinner. Dinner! with what weary disgust Marjory thought of it, and of the compulsory meeting with all the party, the solemn sitting down to table, the politenesses to Mr. Fanshawe, the efforts she would have to make to interpose herself between her father's irritable grief and her uncle Charles's amiable but sometimes untimely wisdom. She changed one black gown for another rapidly, and smoothed her brown hair, which (strangely she felt) kept its bright colour notwithstanding her mourning. What a farce, she thought to herself, (being bitter and sore) that mourning was? It had just as many troublesome accessories as the gayest dress, nay, almost more; for the most heart-broken of women in the deepest of affliction has got to take care of her crape, that dear and odious addition to all mourning garments. From this it is not to be supposed that Marjory was impatient of her crape. She would not have cheated poor Tom out of a single fold, she would

have enveloped herself in it from head to foot rather than fail in any prejudice of respect. But her heart was sore and her mind excited. Nothing seemed to her to be true. Tom had deceived her, leading her to suppose that some matter worthy of her ears was to be revealed to her; and lo! it was but this vulgar, poor, conventional, common sort of secret; and even she herself was a deceiver, for did she not pretend to mourn for Tom even now, when she had begun to feel that perhaps his death was expedient? All in the house gave themselves out to be mourning for poor Tom; yet Uncle Charles had recovered his interest in everything that was going on, and little Milly in the afternoon had laughed—Mr. Fanshawe, who was Tom's friend, and ought to have been more faithful to the poor fellow's memory, having inveigled the child into it. Thus the party would meet, she said to herself, all longing to escape from this gloom, and talk and think like others, but dared not for Falsehood's sake; and she herself, the falsest of all, even saw good in the calamity, and gave thanks for it. What treachery, what untruthfulness was

in all this! The only one who was utterly true in his grief, was the one who would have most chiefly suffered by Tom's further life if he had carried his fancy out—the heart-broken father to whom Marjory, to-morrow, no later, would have to carry Tom's bills, the bills about which, alas! poor Tom had not told the truth. What a confused tangle of falsehood, and pain, and unreality it was!

And Mr. Fanshawe spent a most dreary evening. Marjory had receded, he thought, from all her incipient civilities. She paid scarcely any attention to him, and evaded his skilful reference to the old house, and the visit to it which was to be made to-morrow. If to-morrow was not better than to-day, he felt that he must be driven from Pitcomlie. He could not bear it any longer; and yet there were certain fascinations which held him against his will, even in the midst of this monotony of woe.

CHAPTER XII.

When Marjory went upstairs for the night, she made a strenuous endeavour to get Tom's papers in order for her father, and to ignore the one paper which had opened a door, as it were, in her brother's life, and of which nobody knew but herself. She went on working till long past midnight, always with a consciousness of that letter in the corner, which was like the presence of some one in the room with her, of which she was not supposed to be aware. She tried to forget it, but she could not forget. While she collected the bills and tied them together, her mind went on with a perpetual stream of questions—Who was this girl? Where had Tom met her? Had she really hoped to be Mrs. Heriot of Pit-

comlie? and a hundred other mental inquiries to which, of course, there could come no answer. In her mind, she went over all the countryside, searching into every cottage in order to find out, if possible, who "Isabell" was. It is a common name enough in Fife—a score of Isabells presented themselves to her fancy, but she could not realize any one of them as the writer of that letter. And Tom had spent but little time at home. If it had not been so Scotch even, Marjory's curiosity would have been less excited; but it seemed certain that she must know who it was who wrote in that familiar dialect. While her eye noted the dates of those very different documents which she was collecting—while she made out her list of them, and slowly added up the figures—though that was a mental process somewhat difficult, and not very rapid—her whole soul was absorbed in this other current of thought. She was even capable of feeling grieved and miserable about the effect the bills would have upon her father, while in imagination she was passing from door to door, from cottage to cottage, searching for this Isabell. Was she wondering, per-

haps, what had become of her lover, poor foolish thing! perhaps after all, Marjory allowed, with difficulty, she might be truly fond of him, might love him even, after her fashion—might be suffering such tortures as she was capable of, wondering at his silence, wearying—was not that the word in the letter? wearying, wearying! for him who was to come no more. Was Tom's sister, even for a moment, half sorry for the girl? If she was, Marjory scorned the sentiment as a weakness of nature. Then, in its musing, her mind returned to its first view of the matter. Was it certain, after all, that Tom had so far forgotten himself and his family as to woo Isabell for his wife, as the letter implied? might not this be a mere pretence. It seemed to Marjory that her brother was more likely to have sinned vulgarly by that system of false promises which women suppose men to make so lightly, than that he should have seriously intended to introduce such a mistress to the old house. Which would be worst? There could not be a purer-minded woman than she who pondered, with an aching heart and burning cheeks, this odious question. Was it

possible there could be a question on the matter? Marjory hated herself for hesitating—yet there was something to be said on both sides;—that he should have meant well and honorably would be better for Tom—but for the race, the house—

The ingenuous reader will be disgusted with Marjory, as Marjory was with herself; but notwithstanding, the fact remains which we are obliged to record. She got rid of the dilemma with an impatient sigh, disowning it, refusing to answer her own question; and plunged into her additions, which were not much less painful. Oh! to carry that woeful list to Tom's father! to be obliged to set in order the record of poor Tom's prevarications (what a hard word *lies* is—yet sometimes the right one) and extravagances, and the unhappy meanness which must always mingle with extravagance — how it made her heart ache! She sat through half the night preparing that miserable list, and thinking of the other matter which was equally miserable in whatever light it was contemplated. It was two o'clock in the morning, when with her head and her heart alike throbbing with pain, she rose and

went to her window and looked out upon the night. It was very dark; she could hear the monotonous rising and falling of the sea, sometimes like a long drawn sob, sometimes sharp like a cry, as it beat and splashed upon the rocks. "The moaning of the homeless sea." How many people listening to it all over the world put their own weariness, and sadness, and discouragement into that great and ceaseless voice! Between the black sky and the black water, both cheerless and dismal, Marjory felt as if she stood alone, with no one to help her. The world was asleep—all human sympathy was closed up in unconsciousness. Was that other poor soul, that foolish creature, that Isabell, waking somewhere too, and wondering, wearying in her ignorance? Just then a revolving light, far off, sent a sudden steady, yet momentary, flash across the dark water. It was as well known to her as her own name—yet somehow at that moment it was unexpected, and flashed across the waves to her like a word of consolation. At the same moment, Marjory saw what she had not seen before, a figure standing out upon the cliff, turned with its back to the sea as if gazing up

at the house. It seemed to her, for the moment, like a ghostly visitor, and gave her a little thrill of terror. Then she turned away with a nervous laugh. The red sparkle of the cigar, and something in the outline of the figure, revealed Fanshawe to her. She dropped her blind, and went in with a little comfort—a sense of society and security; probably had it been the old gardener, she would have felt that sensation of comfort just as warmly. But no; had it been the gardener, Marjory would have wanted, in the first place, to know what he did there; with Mr. Fanshawe, she asked no questions. It was as if some one had held out a friendly hand to her through the chilliness and dullness that wrapped the world.

It may seem to many people very strange that Marjory should have had so disagreeable a task to do, and not her father, or uncle, or even their solicitor. I cannot explain it further than by saying that this was the custom among the Hay-Heriots. It is so in some houses; the women of some families, as I believe I have already said, are always thrust forward to receive any domestic blow,

and transmit it, blunted by its first penetration into the softness of their bosoms. Marjory saw nothing remarkable in this, nor did she even complain of it. Had her mother been living, they would both have received the thrust and taken the edge off, before it reached the father; but as it was, the eldest daughter of the house, heiress of its traditions if of little else, took up her inheritance without shrinking. Had it been out-of-door business, the solicitor would have been employed no doubt; but so far as domestic troubles went the wives and daughters at Pitcomlie were the attorneys of the head of the house and bore the brunt first, preparing the burden for him that he might put it on in the easiest way.

"Have you sorted the papers?" Mr. Heriot asked in his harsh voice next morning at breakfast. He never looked at any one now till he had been irritated into attention. His voice had altogether changed. There was a line of redness and heat under his eyes, leaving the rest of his face pallid though still brown—and this redness seemed to be reflected in the eyes themselves, which were

blood-shot and heavy. The droop of his head, the inward look he had, the air of absorption, the passionate inclination to find fault when he spoke at all, altered his aspect so entirely that his friends of six months ago would scarcely have known the man. He never looked even at his daughters. He spoke to Marjory with his eyes fixed upon his coffee, which he swallowed in great gulps. Mr. Charles had insisted upon talking to him of the visits they had received the day before, which perhaps had something to do with the suppressed passion which showed itself in his tone.

"Not quite," said Marjory, faltering, "nearly, papa—perhaps to-morrow—"

"Tomorrow!" he said, "who can say anything about to-morrow? are you or I so sure of seeing it that we should put off our duty? You are a silly thing like the rest. What is to hinder you to give a day to your work like the most part of your fellow-creatures? They go out to their day's darg, be it storm or fine, with a sore heart or a light one. But the like of you must be kept from every fashious thing."

"I submit it to you, Thomas, whether that's quite fair upon Marjory," said Mr. Charles, "we're all in sore trouble—sore trouble, and you worst of all, poor man! but as the Minister says—"

"Confound the Minister!" said Mr. Heriot, "am I to be insulted in my own house by an auld fool, with his cut and dry phrases? I know my duty as well as he does. Marjory, go to your work, and see you do it, and let me have the papers, not later than to-night."

"I shall be ready," said Marjory softly, as her father left the table. She was ready then, to tell the truth; it was but her reluctance to give him another blow that held her back. She was sorry for him to the bottom of her heart; had she been rich enough to satisfy those claims without carrying them to him, her path would have been easy enough. But she was poor—the eldest daughter, the trusted of everybody, was the only person in the house who had nothing. Her mother had been poor, so that Marjory had no fortune by that side; and Mr. Heriot's sons had been expensive and cost him a great deal of money. Marjory would have something when he died, but so long

as he lived she had her small allowance, and nothing more. Little Milly was in a much better position; she would have an independent fortune before she had nearly attained Marjory's age. But Marjory in her mature womanhood, twenty-five, had nothing but fifty pounds a year for her dress; sometimes she felt it was hard, and this was one of these times. It was by way of escaping from herself that she turned to Fanshawe, who was a very close though silent observer of all that went on. She raised her eyes to him, and addressed him frankly with a look of confidence and friendliness which she had never shown to him before.

"You were very late last night," she said, "I saw you upon the cliff."

"Then that was your window," he said, surprised into an admission, "I thought so—I had been walking up and down watching it. It looked like the protecting—light of the house."

He had been on the eve of saying "angel," but stopped in time.

"Not much of a protection," said Marjory, still frank as she had never been before, "it was

you who gave me that feeling. I had been working late and I was tired, and the very sight of you was friendly—you and the lighthouse together. You both shone out at the same time; though by the way, now I think of it, it was much too late for you to be out."

"How did you know it was Mr. Fanshawe?" said Mr. Charles, "in the dark *tous les chats sont gris*; and it was very dark last night."

"I knew him by his cigar," said Marjory with a little laugh; not that she had any inclination to laugh, but that she had turned her back with a wild resolution upon the subjects that occupied her, determined at least for the moment to get rid of them. "It was improper, and he ought not to have been there smoking at two o'clock in the morning; but the sight of some one was a comfort to me."

"That is a strange way of convincing me of impropriety," said Fanshawe, delighted, "of course I shall go on doing it all the days of my life. The scene was very wild, as wild as any I ever saw. How black the Firth was, and the sky, and how the surf boiled upon the rocks! It

looked like Norway or Canada, rather than this sober well-to-do Fife."

"That is all climate, nothing but climate," said Mr. Charles, "the thermometer has varied fifteen degrees since Sunday—fifteen degrees! it is just astonishing. Of course anyone could see with half an eye that Sunday was too fine to last. Are you going to work, Marjory, my dear, as your father said?"

"I am going out first for a breath of air," she answered. She was almost gay in her eagerness to escape from herself, and to stave off the painful moment which was coming. She took Milly's hand and ran round to the drawing-room where the windows opened upon the cliff. She went out into the morning sunshine, which fell full upon her uncovered head; the wind blew her hair about, waking in it gleams of richer colour which the sun found out. Nobody knew that it was a kind of desperation which roused Marjory. Her uncle looked at her puzzled and half disapproving, and shook his head. He thought it was a doubtful example she was setting before the servants, so soon after—and

Fleming, who looked on very seriously, was of that opinion too.

As for Fanshawe he followed her with delight. "Now is the time for the old house," he said, as he went after the two pretty figures, the young woman and the child, to the edge of the rocks. The sea was blue and the morning bright, the whole world renovated by the new day; and mourning cannot last for ever any more than night. Fanshawe felt disposed to push old Fleming over the rocks when he came brushing past with evident satisfaction to interrupt this moment of ease, with a trayful of letters. But who is there in this nineteenth century bold enough to obstruct the passage of the post? He had to stand humbly by, and accept his own share, which Fleming handed to him, he thought with a certain triumph, and which consisted of three bills, a note from a livery-stable keeper informing him that his only horse had met with an accident, and an invitation to join a party who were setting out from Cowes on a yachting expedition that day. He got through this satisfactory and pleasant correspondence at a rapid

rate, and then he sauntered to the edge of the cliff to wait till Marjory had satisfied herself with her letters. No doubt this would be a much longer process—no doubt she had a hundred dearest friends, who wrote about a thousand ridiculous nothings, and filled up her time and distracted her attention. She had seated herself on the mossy stone steps of the old sun-dial, which stood on that velvet green, undecorated lawn. She had her back turned to him, so that he could look at her at his ease. He thought what a pretty picture it would make; the grey house behind her, with trees appearing beyond that on the land side, and here nothing but the green, green turf, without any flowers, ending in the brown rock of the cliff which descended sheer down, a dangerous precipice to the sea. Milly's golden hair, all blown about, was the central point in the picture; while Marjory with her head drooped over her letters sat on the steps of the old dial, with the wind lightly fluttering her black ribbons, and the golden lights in her brown hair shining out in the sun.

The next moment she uttered a low cry, throw-

ing up her hands. Fanshawe rushed forward. Mr. Charles had gone away to his rooms; Milly had strayed back into the drawing-room; he and she were alone; he rushed up to her—

"Are you ill? What has happened, Miss Heriot?"

"I do not think I am ill. I do not think I can be dreaming. I am sick with fright," cried Marjory. "Oh, Mr. Fanshawe, for God's sake read that, and tell me what you think!"

He took the letter out of her hand. An Indian letter, on thin paper, written with faint ink. For the moment he could not make out the meaning of her terror. This is what he read:—

"Dear Marjory,

"You will be surprised to learn that we are on our way home, though I am sure I am anything but able to travel, nor the poor baby neither, who is a very wee, feeble thing, and not at all well suited with an Ayah. The reason is, Charlie has had the fever again. He would not let me tell you, but I may now, as he is too ill to know what I am writing. This is the third attack, and the

doctor at the station, who is a very odd sort of man, coddling up all the men, and never caring for the ladies, has taken a fright; and, what is worse, has given Charlie a fright—and applied for furlough, without even consulting me, though we cannot afford it, and your father has always so opposed his coming home. You need not think it is my fault, for I am no more fit to travel than to fly, and probably will die on the way, and never trouble you. And if both of us die, as seems more than likely, I hope you will be kind to the children, or at least to Tommy, for baby, I feel, will go with me, if I go. I am sure if the doctor would but leave poor Charlie quiet he would get better, as he has done before; but he has to be lifted into a litter, and carried all the way to Calcutta; and how I am to be expected to look after everything—him, and the luggage, and the children—is more than I know. What with baby's nurse not agreeing with him, and Charlie's being so ill, and not a soul to give me any assistance, I get no rest night nor day; and when I recollect that it is only six weeks since I was confined, I cannot think how anybody has the

heart to ask me to do it. However, the doctor has to be obeyed, though I hate him, and we have got leave, and the agents are to lend us the money (for we never have a penny). You need not write, for we hope to catch the steamer at Calcutta, and should be in England in the end of April. But don't be surprised if Tommy comes alone; for even if Charlie gets a little better, I do not think I can bear the journey, and baby is sure to go along with me. Good-bye; if we reach England alive, I will send you word from Southampton; but I don't expect it, for how we are ever to get through the journey—I as weak as water, and my poor baby only six weeks old, and Charlie in a litter—is more than I can say.

"Your affectionate sister,

"MATILDA.

"P.S.—Be kind to Tommy, if he is the only one that reaches home."

"What do you think?" cried Marjory, raising her face to him.

She had forgotten it was Fanshawe. He was the first human creature at hand—the only one to whom she could turn in her distress.

"It is a silly letter; making the worst of everything. It is not, I am sure it cannot be, so bad as she says."

"She does not make the worst of Charlie's illness," said Marjory. "Oh, my poor Charlie! She says next to nothing about him. It is not *her* I am thinking of. My brother — my poor brother, must be dying! Oh God! and what shall we do?"

"She does not say so," said Fanshawe, kneeling down beside her. "Dear Miss Heriot, don't be too easily alarmed. You are weak with the sorrow you have had already. You think everything must end badly—"

"I know it," she said, with a moan; "I know it! We have had nothing happen to us for so long—so long. And it is all coming together now!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE letter of Mrs. Charles aroused a great consternation in the house of Pitcomlie; they did not venture to tell Mr. Heriot of it. Fanshawe went and called Mr. Charles out of his room in the tower, and they all gathered in the bow-window in the drawing-room, and read it sentence by sentence, and talked it over. Marjory was the only one who took no comfort by this meeting. Mr. Charles was very much cast down for the first moment, but it did not last. "She's a very silly woman, a very silly woman," he said over and over. "I'm not meaning to vex you, May; but nothing except a woman could be so silly and so heartless; she is thinking only of herself. However, on the other hand, if Charlie

had been so bad as you think, she would have been frightened. There's something in a book I once read about having that fever thrice; the third time is the—God bless me! I cannot remember what my book said."

The fact was, Mr. Charles remembered only too well, and was appalled; he was struck dumb for the moment in his voluble consolations. When he spoke again, he was a great deal less assured in his tone. "Depend upon it," he said, "she is making the worst of everything. I suppose it is her way. She's evidently a silly woman, a very silly woman, and I would say a very selfish one. But she would not run on like that about herself and the baby, if Charlie was as ill as you think."

"Charlie might be very ill, and she might not know it," said Marjory, "they might not tell her—they might think it would be too much for her in her circumstances. Her baby not six weeks old, and her husband coming home to —"

"To get better, my dear," said Uncle Charles cheerily. "You may be sure to get better. He

is young, and has everything in his favour. The very sea-breezes would stir him up. I do not think I would take any notice, my love, to your father. It would only worry him. It will be time enough when you get word from Southampton; and how that will cheer him! Poor Thomas—poor man! I begin to think now that there's some hope for your father, May."

"But what will there be if Charlie —"

"Toots, nonsense, Charlie! Charlie will come home quite well, you'll see," said Mr. Charles. "But as for you, you're looking like a ghost. I'll go and order the horses, and we'll take Mr. Fanshawe out and show him the country. We are all dying for a breath of air."

"I could not go, I cannot go," said Marjory. "Mr. Fanshawe will forgive me, that I cannot think of anything but one thing. Oh, Uncle Charles! have we done anything to bring such misery on the house?"

"My dear," said Mr. Charles, "the rain and the sun come on the just and on the unjust, as the Scriptures say. We are not justified in forming any rash judgment on ourselves."

"And we have been happy so long!" said Marjory with tears. It seemed a kind of reason for all the misery that was coming now.

"Happy, humph! I would not say—there is many a thing that looks like happiness when you are in great trouble, that was little to brag of when it was here. But in the meantime, I'm going back to my papers," said Mr. Charles, "Mr. Fanshawe, my man, come you with me, you'll perhaps find something to divert you. She's better left to herself—far better left to herself," he added in an undertone. "Womenfolk are not like us, she'll take a cry and she'll be better. To be sure," said Mr. Charles, as he led the way to his tower, looking back upon his reluctant follower, "there's ill men and good men in all the degrees; but I cannot think of a difference so great among us as between that girl, my niece, May, and the like of the selfish creature that wrote that letter. Not a word, not a thought of poor Charlie, as fine a lad as ever stepped—but all her bit miserable bantling of a baby, and her weary self."

"I suppose, Sir, when a woman has a child

she thinks of nothing else," said Fanshawe, "or so at least people say."

"Then the Lord preserve my niece, May, from ever having children!" said Mr. Charles, striding up the steps of his tower with his long legs, and with hot but holy indignation in his tone. Luckily the echoing of the spiral staircase drowned the laugh with which his companion listened. Fanshawe laughed only from his lips, for to tell the truth the suggestion annoyed him. He seemed immediately to see Marjory with a child in her arms, lavishing fondness upon it, while some idiot of a husband looked complacently on. Sometimes men love to weave such associations about women, sometimes on the contrary they are revolted by the notion; and the latter was Fanshawe's case. He had not gone so far as even to dream of the possibility of marrying Marjory, or anyone else himself—and of course she would marry, some fool, some Johnnie something or other who never could, never would satisfy that woman's mind. She would do it out of mere kindness, to please him, or to please somebody else, some old grandmother

or uncle, or ancient bore of one kind or another, and drop into a mere child-producing, baby-worshipping dowdy; she would be compelled to take to babies, the husband being a fool and unworthy of her. Fanshawe listened to Mr. Charles's lecture on the history of the Fife families with languor after this, making now and then an impertinent observation which startled the sage.

He asked "What did it matter?" when his companion enlarged upon that doubtful point in the pedigree of the Morrisons, where it was rumoured, a captain from the whale-fishing had come and married the heiress and injured the blood. "Matter!" said Mr. Charles with true indignation, "it matters just this, Sir, that the auld house of the Morrisons deriving from Sir Adam of that name, that was drowned in the ship that brought over the Maid of Norway, would be turned into mere nobodies—nobodies, Sir; with a harpoon and a fishing-net for their cognizance—"

"But even a harpoon and a fishing-net, after a century—" Fanshawe began.

"Century, Sir; what's about a century?" said Mr. Charles.

But Fanshawe did not carry on the quarrel. He was too much occupied in considering the original question with which he had started, and how confoundedly Johnnie something or other would crow over the rest of mankind if such a woman was so silly as to marry him—a question embodying, as he felt, more human interest than any difficulty that could arise in regard to the captain of the whaling-ship.

Marjory did not do as her uncle prophesied. This last piece of news had dried up all tears from her eyes. She wandered about the upper part of the house, now pausing in that room where Fanshawe had been once called to her, and which still bore the name of "the boys' room," and now returning to her own. She even took a napkin and dusted carefully poor Charlie's share of the books, and his golfing-clubs, and some small statuettes belonging to him; she put some flowers in a little vase under his portrait, and then withdrew them quickly, and threw them out of her window, some chance thought of resemblance to the decking

of a grave having struck her fancy. She was sick and restless, unable to keep still, longing for news —further news—fearing to allow herself to think.

After some time, when she had made up the packet of Tom's papers for her father, she took the letter which had so much disturbed her yesterday from the desk, and placed it in a little letter-case with the one she had received that day. Why she did this she could not have explained. She went wandering in her listlessness and suspense all over the house, finding here and there some trifle to rectify, which gave her a momentary occupation, and, what was more wonderful, finding at every turn some reminiscence of her brother Charlie, which a few hours ago she would not have noted. He had been out of the house for many years, and never till to-day had she been aware how much there was of him still in the old home, which somehow seemed to Marjory to-day like a mother preserving traces of all her children. An old fishing-rod of his hung in the hall; a bird which he had shot, and which for some boyish fancy had been stuffed and preserved, stood looking at her

with its little beady eyes from the corner of the staircase. She had forgotten all about it till to-day.

At last Marjory, in the sickness of her heart, went to the old Tower, to her uncle's room. There she could talk a little at least, which might be a relief. Mr. Fanshawe had long before left that refuge of learning and leisure, and Mr. Charles, who was compiling a family history, sat among his papers with his spectacles on his nose, collecting facts and arranging pedigrees, as calmly as though there were no present anxieties to disturb his mind, or future to thrill it into terror.

"Well, May, my dear!" he said, cheerily, looking up at her over the top of his spectacles; and then relapsed into his work. It is impossible to estimate the advantage which that work was to Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot. It kept him occupied, it kept him happy, it gave him "a duty" which he was bent on performing and a "responsibility" which he was proud to feel. He would search for days together to prove the accuracy of a date—happy days, during

which he felt himself as important as Herodotus. Friends all over the country would stop him when they met, and would write him letters when they were apart, to ask how "his work" was progressing. He had come now to a very important part of that work. He had collected all the materials for his fifth chapter, which began the Reformation period, and he had now begun the work of composition, putting these materials together, which was a very interesting and solemn operation. He had not said anything about this *Opus* to Fanshawe the first time he had invited him to his room; but to-day, in the confidence of increasing friendship, he had told him, and the little flutter of pleasurable importance with which he had taken the stranger into his confidence hung about him still.

"Well, May, my dear," he said, after a long pause, "you have come to see how I am getting on?"

"I am looking at you, Uncle Charles," said Marjory, dreamily. How far off he seemed from her in that placid, gentle old age, with the occupation that pleased him as its games

please a child! Could his blood boil any more, or his heart throb any more as hers was throbbing? She sighed unconsciously as she spoke. It seemed to her that Fanshawe, who was a stranger, yet who was in full tide of life, and knew what it meant to be cast about by varying tumults of feeling, would understand her better than her calm old uncle—"though he was a stranger," Marjory, in her unconsciousness, said to herself.

"Well, my dear, I hope it's no uninstructive," said Mr. Charles, with a gentle laugh. "I do not set up for genius; but so far as work goes—honest work—"

There was a pause again, but that was not an unusual circumstance. Marjory was a frequent visitor in the tower, and sometimes the two, who were fond of each other, would sit together for hours pursuing their own occupations, with a pleasant sense of companionship but without any talk. His niece's presence did not disturb the old man; he went on quite peacefully, taking it for granted that she, too, was occupied in her way. Nor did he lay down his pen, or look up at

her face until she broke the silence by the sudden question,

"Now you have had time to consider it, what do you think about Charlie, Uncle Charles?"

"Toots, my dear!" said Uncle Charles. He put down his pen, as we have said, and stretched his hand to her across the table. "You are getting silly—like other women, my bonnie May."

"But what do you *think*, Uncle Charles?"

"I can think no more than I did before, for I have no more information," said Mr. Charles, pushing back his chair, and crossing his long legs; "and thinking will do no good—no good, my dear, if we were to think till we died of it. You just make yourself unhappy indulging anxiety. We must wait till we hear."

"But what do you think of the letter, Uncle Charles?"

"The letter—oh, that's something tangible. It's a very heartless letter, a very silly letter; but you heard beforehand that she was a silly thing. So far as I can see, there is very little in it about Charlie; and as for her weakness and her baby's, that's not so very important. No fear of them;

and as for you and me, May, whatever happened to Mrs. Charles, we could get over *that*."

"I wish her no harm," said Marjory hastily.

"Certainly, no harm," said Mr. Charles; "but oh, my dear, what a woman to be mistress of Pitcomlie! what a creature to come after my mother! and your mother, May—though she, poor thing, reigned but a short time in the old house. This one will be a new kind of lady among the Heriots. We've been fortunate in our wives, as I've often told you. I am just giving a description of how Leddy Pitcomlie, under the Regent Mary of Guise, held the old house against the French. She was one of the first converts of the Reformation. We were terrible Whigs in those days; she was a daughter of—"

"Yes," said Marjory vaguely. "That is something new to think of—Matilda in Pitcomlie. Uncle, we never knew—you never heard—that Pitcomlie might have had another kind of mistress?"

Mr. Charles raised himself with eager interest. This was entirely in his way, and moved his curiosity to the utmost.

"Another kind of mistress? There was your stepmother, of course—a nice kind of creature; but she did not live. A wife that does not live is a misfortunate thing in a family; it deranges the records, and takes away the unity; but is it of her you are thinking? What other mistress, May, if it were not yourself?"

"This is what I found in Tom's desk," said Marjory, turning pale and then red with emotion and excitement. She had not meant to show it—and yet it was so hard to keep from showing it—to shut up the secret in her own breast. She drew out her letter-case slowly, and took from it the uneven paper, with its uncouth writing, so unlike Matilda's smooth and ladylike letter. Some accidental sound in the room, some creaking of the furniture, or rustling of the papers which the wind from the open window rustled on the table, almost arrested her, and made her look up with startled awe-stricken eyes, as if some unseen messenger had come to stop her. At length she put it into her uncle's hand. He had followed all her movements with surprise, and now he had to fumble for his spectacles, to put them on, to

uncross his legs, and draw his chair close to the table. All these little preliminaries had to be gone through, for to Mr. Charles a letter was a document; it was valuable material to be put away for after-use. He read a few lines, and then he gave a startled look at Marjory. "My dear," he said, with indignation, folding it up again; "such a thing as this should never have fallen into your hands; it's disgraceful! it's ——. My dear, your father goes too far—putting the charge of Tom's things on you. He was not a reprobate, but he was not an example. Forget it, May, forget it; such a thing should never have been shown to you."

"But Uncle Charles! you see what she says—'I'll make a good wife.'"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my dear," said the old man, with a flush on his face; "the sort of thing that lads say to beguile these silly fools. I am not defending men, nor is it a subject to be named between you and me; but if you but knew how these silly idiots court their destruction! not another word more. My dear May, my bonny May! to think that the like of this should have been seen by you!"

"Uncle, it is not a fool's letter; it is not a wicked letter—"

"Whisht, whisht, my bonnie woman! as if the like of you could judge; not another word. I will burn it for poor Tom's sake. He has answered his account with his Maker, and why should we keep evidence against him for those that come after us—"

"Give it me back again," said Marjory, feeling her property invaded; "I cannot have it burned, uncle. Perhaps this was the something he wanted to tell me; give it me back. Oh," she said, suddenly forced by the opposition to a great effort of nature; "it is very different from this other letter; very different! *She* would not have written of my Charlie as his wife does. Give it me, Uncle; I must keep it. It is Tom's legacy to me."

"May, May! trouble and suspense are turning your head."

"My head is not turned," she said; "give me back my letter, Uncle; I thought you would help me. Whatever she was, wherever she is, she was not like *that*."

Mr. Charles allowed her to draw it out of his hand; he shook his head and reproved her gently.

"My dear, you are excited; you do not know what you are saying. Put it away, put it away, if you will have it; but do not speak of an unhappy girrl in the same breath with Charlie's wife. That must never be; and such a thing should never, never have come into your hands."

Marjory hurried away almost angry, with her letters in her hand. She could ask counsel from no one else; and here she had failed; she rushed back to her room with them, very sad at heart; she, to make herself the champion of the unknown girl, whose very existence had seemed to her no later than yesterday, such a sin and shame!

CHAPTER XIV.

It would be vain to attempt to trace the manner in which this revulsion of feeling came about. Marjory had gone through the whole gamut of emotions in respect to the letter which she had found in Tom's desk. First shame, indignation, and the hardest sentence with which women can damn a woman. Then a wavering of the balance, a protestation of justice against the hasty verdict which might have no foundation. Then a sense of escape and gratitude that no harm had come of it; and last of all, a tremulous feeling of pity, perhaps the first Christian sentiment of the whole, but the only one of which Marjory was ashamed. The thing, however, which all at once had made this pity into

sudden sympathy was the letter of Mrs. Charles — a woman about whom there could be no controversy. Charlie's equal — Charlie's most lawful wife, under all the regulations and safeguards that law and religion could give. When she placed the one letter by the other, Marjory's heart swelled with a sudden indignant vindication of the poor unknown girl who had loved her brother. All at once Isabell became a distinct individual, almost a friend. A sudden protest against all her own suspicions arose in her mind; she acquitted the girl of everything as she had accused her of everything. The process of thought was easy enough—its very suddenness was natural. She went to the quietness of her room in which she had first read Isabell's letter with such a tempest of shame and humiliation, with very different feelings, contrasting Matilda's letter with this other one, and asking herself, with a vehemence of indignation which surprised her, which of them was the least womanly—which the more true and real. Her emotion, however, though she was not aware of it, was not all founded upon this contrast. In point of fact, it

afforded a certain outlet to her excitement, and solaced her in the misery of her suspense. She locked up the letters in her jewel case, with a fantastic sense of their importance; she turned the little silver key upon them, as if she had been imprisoning two potent spirits. Some day or other, the prisoners would be liberated, and come forth, each to fight her own battle. Marjory was sane enough still to smile at her own fantastic force of imagination as this thought crossed her mind—to smile at it momentarily, as a kind of tribute to her reason; but without any real sense of ridicule. How her interest had shifted since yesterday, since this morning! Poor Tom's papers lying there, carefully made up, seemed to her a year old at least, something done with and over. But Charlie, Charlie! was he being carried home to them over the sea, breathing in health and restoration from every breeze, coming to his natural place, the only son, the heir, the future head of the house? Or was he? —Marjory clasped her hands tightly together with a low cry of pain. Of all miseries on earth, I think suspense is the hardest to bear. To

think that something may be happening that very moment, while you are far off, and for good or for evil can do nothing. To think that something may have happened—that the dread calm of certainty may have followed the excitement of a terrible event to the others who know; and to be unable to go out to meet the news you long for—to have nothing to do but to wait for it. There is no more common misery in the experience, at least, of women; and there is none more hard to bear.

Marjory passed that dreary, restless afternoon in hourly expectation of a call from her father, but Mr. Heriot did not call her. He took no notice of the subject which he had spoken of so angrily at breakfast, when they met at dinner. When that meal was almost over, old Fleming carried to her, with voluble explanations, another letter.

"Mistress Williamson has sent up to say that by some accident this was putten in to the Carslogie bag," said Fleming. "It's an Indian letter, and it's come back with a man and horse, being markit 'Immediate,' as you'll see, Miss Marjory.

Mistress Williamson, poor body, is terrible vexed; and being an Indian letter, and markit 'Immediate'—"

"Thank you; that will do, Fleming," said Marjory, seizing it.

Oh, if she could but have rushed from the table to make herself mistress of this second message! Her heart sank down, down to the very depths. All hope seemed to die in her; yet she threw her handkerchief over it, and tried to control herself. There had been a pause, as there so often was now at that cheerless table; and Mr. Charles, who was not very quick of hearing, had put his hand to his ear, and asked, "What is it?" which called his brother's attention to the occurrence. Mr. Heriot, who had been very silent, turned to his daughter with the angry tone which he now always employed when he spoke to her.

"Why don't you read your letter? There are no strangers here but Mr. Fanshawe, and he, I suppose, does not stand on ceremony. From India, did that blockhead say?"

"Ay, Sir; that was what the blockhead said,"

answered Fleming, who was behind his chair. "I'm no minding what you call me. It was a bletterin' scoondrel yesterday, and it may be a good fellow the morn. I hope I know how to do my duty, whatever happens; if you'll but eat some dinner," the old man added, dropping his voice with an inflection which was almost tender.

This little interruption directed Mr. Heriot's thoughts from Marjory's letter. He bade Fleming begone for an old rogue, and emptied the dish he offered. Something had softened the heart-broken father in his passion of grief; or else the high-pressure, the immediate violence of his feelings, was wearing out. It was only after some minutes that, still harsh and sharp in his tone to her, though softened to others, he looked down the table to Marjory, and asked quickly,

"Was your letter from Charlie? Does he say when he's coming? What is it about?"

"It is a letter from Matilda's sister," said Marjory, in a voice tremulous with suppressed feeling. "We do not know her, papa—a Miss Bassett. She tells me she was to join them at

Calcutta, to come home with them, and something about hoping to make my acquaintance. That is all."

"That is not much," said Mr. Heriot; "but to know he is on the way is something. If I but see my boy back— Fleming, there's that claret with the yellow seal—"

"Is Charlie—?" began Mr. Charles.

He was going to say was Charlie better. To him, as to all the others, it seemed so long since this morning, when the news of Charlie's illness came, that the arrival of further news did not seem impossible. The same strange feeling of the long duration of these few sorrowful days dulled Mr. Heriot's mind to the recollection that it was a very short time since Charlie had been called home, and that no reply to that call could have come so soon. He accepted Marjory's explanation without any more questions, while Mr. Charles stopped, trembling, in his question, appalled by the look which she had given him. Mr. Heriot took no notice; a little gleam of happier feeling seemed to wake in him. He entered into a little dispute with Fleming, as to how much was left of the yellow seal. And when

Marjory left the room soon after, he even stopped her, with some return of gentleness, to give her directions about Charlie's rooms.

"If you are thinking what rooms to give them, May," he said, hastily, "put them in the west wing. It will be warmest for the bairns."

It was the first time he had called her by her name since the funeral. Poor Marjory hurried away, choking, afraid to trust herself to speak, assenting only with a movement of her head.

"Oh, papa's better! don't you think he's better? He kissed me, May," cried little Milly, as they went hand in hand along the passage which led to the drawing-room.

Marjory made no answer. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to think it all over. She placed herself in the corner of a sofa which commanded the great bow-window, and from which she could see so much of the pale grey blue sky and wistful half-twilight atmosphere. A nervous thrill was upon her. She had heard

nothing; and yet was not this letter confirmation of her worst fears?

The lamp burnt steadily and clear upon the table; the firelight flickered from the fireplace. A comfortable interior, warm, and safe, and calm, full of homely luxury, but so strangely connected with the outside world by that uncovered window, and the pale sky that looked in. It was symbolical, Marjory thought. What might be going on beneath that chilly heaven, beneath the great pale vault which roofed the sea, where, dead or living, Charlie was? Her heart ached with the burden of that suspense. How hard it was to bear it, and say nothing—and to let her father take fallacious comfort, only to be the more deeply overthrown!

She had been only a few minutes here when some one followed hastily from the dining-room. She thought it was her uncle, and turned to him, holding out her hand. But the hand was taken with a warmth of sympathy, which Uncle Charles would scarcely have shown.

"Pardon me," said Fanshawe; "I was so anxious. I came to ask what your news really

is. You don't think me impertinent? I wanted so much to know."

This sudden touch of sympathy moved Marjory, as the unexpected always does. It was so much warmer, and more ready than Uncle Charles' slow effort to follow her quicker feelings; his search for spectacles, both physical and mental; his reproofs of needless anxiety. She was overcome for the moment, and gave way to sudden tears, which relieved her. "Thanks," she said, with a half sob; "there is nothing in it; at least I think there is nothing in it; read it and tell me what you think."

He had to go to the lamp, which was on the centre table, where Milly, confused and wondering to find herself without any share in her sister's thoughts, had seated herself in forlorn virtue "to read her book." Many a look Milly threw at Marjory upon the distant sofa in the dark, looking at that window where the shutters were not shut, nor the curtains drawn, and which frightened the child with eerie suggestions of some one who might be looking in upon her. She looked up at Mr. Fanshawe, too, as he stood over her, un-

conscious of her existence, reading that letter. What was it about? and why should he know about it, while Milly did not know? She read a sentence in her book between each of these glances, and was divided in her mind between the intent of this present drama, which she did not understand, and that of the story of the poor little boy, who died because he was good. The story itself made the child's heart ache, and the other strange mystery confused her. Fanshawe read the letter anxiously, as if he had something to do with it; he thought he had for the moment. Marjory's confidence in him, her appeal to him that morning, the subtle effect of feeling himself a member, even temporarily, of this household, and becoming penetrated with its atmosphere, all wrought in him. He had no intention of appearing more interested than he was; he was quite honest in the warmth and depth of his sympathetic feelings. And this was a letter of a very different character from the other; it was very short, and quite unemotional.

"Dear Miss Heriot,

"I hear from my sister that she is going home

with her husband and the children; and I hear from others that he is very ill. I have made up my mind, with my father's consent, to go with Matty, who, I need not tell you, is very unfit for any such responsibility. I have heard of you from poor Charles, and I think you may perhaps be glad to know that there is some one of some sense with them, whatever happens. I hope you will kindly allow me to go to you for a few days, to see them safely settled; but anyhow, I shall be with them, to take care of them to the best of my power.

"Believe me, dear Miss Heriot,

"Sincerely yours,

"INVERNA BASSET."

"What a strange name, and what a strange little letter!" said Fanshawe, drawing a chair in front of Marjory's sofa, and seating himself there; "but there is nothing in this, Miss Heriot, to alarm you—more—"

Marjory had felt her heart lighten—until he came to that last word, which he said with hesitation, after a pause. For the moment it had

appeared to her that the stranger's eye, cooler than her own, had seen something re-assuring in the letter; but all the more for this momentary relief did her heart sink. "More!" she echoed, with a forlorn voice. "I could not be more alarmed than I am. I am almost more than alarmed. I am ——."

"Hush," he said softly, putting out his hand to touch hers, with a momentary soothing, caressing touch. "Hush! don't say anything to make your terrors worse. You are very anxious; and it is natural. But think, he is young; he will have two anxious nurses. He will have quiet and the sea-air, and the knowledge that he is coming home. After all, everything is in his favour. I do not ask you not to be anxious; but try to think of the good as well as the evil."

"The evil is so much more likely than the good," said Marjory. "He is weakened with fever; one of his nurses will be taken up with herself and her baby; the other is almost a stranger to him. Then the sea-air will be neutralized by the close cabin, the wearisome confinement; and he does not even know that his father will be glad

to see him. Had he come home sick a month ago, only a month ago, he would not have been very welcome, perhaps. All this has to be considered, and poor Charlie knows it. Mr. Fanshawe, I do not mean to blame my poor father—"

"I know," said Fanshawe, still with the same soothing tone and gesture. "You must not think me so dull and stupid. I am not much of a fellow—I am not worthy of your confidence; but at least I am capable of understanding. I see all that is passing—"

Marjory was half touched, half repelled; touched by his humility and by his sympathy; but so sensitive was her condition, almost turned from him by that position of spectator, that very faculty of seeing everything, of which he made a plea for her favour. She drew back from him slightly, without explaining to herself why.

"Yes," she said; "but you must remember that a stranger sees more, sometimes, than there is to see; and less, less a great deal than he thinks. My father has always been a most kind father to all of us. At this present moment our

loss has absorbed him in one thought; but he has always considered all our interests, and a month ago Charlie's return would have meant a great loss to Charlie, which my father, with his sense of justice to the rest of us, would not have felt himself justified im making up."

Marjory gave forth this piece of special pleading with a calm air of abstract justice, which moved Fanshawe at once to a smile and a tear. He dared not for his life have shown his inclination to the first; and, indeed, he was sufficiently *attendri* by his position to make the other more natural.

"I know, I know," he said, hastily; and then added, "Nevertheless, I think you may put some confidence in the writer of this letter. Who is she—do you know her? It seems as if she would not talk, but do."

"Charlie speaks of her as the strong-minded sister," said Marjory. "He has mentioned her two or three times. Their father is a Civil servant in Calcutta, and she keeps his house. They have no mother. She takes care of everything, I have always heard. Charlie laughs at

her, but I think he likes her. She does everything. Perhaps that is why the other sister is so helpless—I mean; Mr. Fanshawe, you hear everything as if you were one of the family. I have never seen Charlie's wife; most likely my idea of her is wrong. You will forget it; you will not think of it again."

"I hope I shall be worthy of your confidence," said Fanshawe. "I think I almost am. It seems to me that I must be another man since I knew you. I have never thought much of anything; but now if thinking would do any good—"

"I don't believe it does," said Marjory, with a smile. It was very faint and momentary, but yet it was a smile. "The less one thinks and the more one can do, that is the best."

"But you do not approve of simple want of thought," he said, cunningly drawing her into those superficial metaphysics which take such a large place in serious flirtations. He was not consciously thinking of flirtation, but he thought he had a right to take advantage of his opportunities. Marjory, however, divined without perceiving, the trap.

"Had my father left the dining-room, Mr. Fanshawe? He looked better to-night. I see you are surprised at old Fleming's freedom, and how he talks. He is an old servant; he has seen us all come into the world. We could not speak to him as to an ordinary servant. Ah! here is Uncle Charles at last!"

This exclamation was not agreeable to her present companion. He repeated the "At last!" to himself with a sense of failure which was very irritating. Surely he was as good as Uncle Charles, at least.

CHAPTER XV.

SOME days passed on in a noiseless calm of suspense; suspense which dwelt chiefly in Marjory's mind, and did not hang heavily upon anyone else. Mr. Charles, with the placidity of his age and character, settled the question beforehand with sanguine confidence.

"Depend upon it, my dear, we'll have him home all right and well," he said; "quite well. There is nothing like a sea-voyage for fever; it's self-evident. That little woman, that sister-in-law, will take good care of him. What an energetic bit creature it must be! Why do I say bit creature? She may be as tall as you are? No, no, that's impossible. It was a small creature that wrote that letter; a little woman,

probably no so young as she once was, but a kind of capable being, that will make him do as she pleases. You may be sure she has a will of her own. She will guide him like a boy at school, which will be the best thing for him. Depend upon it, my dear, she'll bring him to us safe and sound."

Marjory did not depend upon it, but she kept silence, and the slow days crept on. Fanshawe lingered, he could scarcely have told why. No one asked him to stay. He was accepted by all as part of the family, with a quiet composure which is sometimes more grateful to a man than protestations of cordiality; but that was not his reason for remaining at Pitcomlie. He stayed—because he said to himself he wanted to see it out. It was a chapter of family history into which he had been thrust unwittingly, and he must see what would be the end of it—if the other brother would come back, and poor Tom's place be filled up—or if—

It had the excitement of a drama to him; and Marjory's face, day after day, varying as the weather varied, brightening into hope sometimes

under the influence of the sunshine, falling blank and pale into despondency with every cloud, interested him as nothing had ever interested him before. This passion of suspense which possessed her whole soul, purified and elevated her beauty somehow. It made her features finer, the outline of her face more perfect, and gave a hundred pathetic meanings to her eyes. For she was not selfishly absorbed nor dead to other things. Through the veil of that pre-occupation which wrapped her about like a mist, nature would struggle forth now and then, coming to the surface, as it were, with smiles and outbreaks of lighter feeling or of independent thought. Anxious as she was, she was too true and natural to be always thinking even of her brother. And Marjory could not be monotonous even in her gloom. She changed from one phase to another, so that the spectator seemed to grow in knowledge of humanity, and wondered to himself how one emotion could put on so many semblances.

And she was relieved on her father's account, though disturbed on Charlie's. Mr. Heriot had

never again asked for Tom's papers. He had relaxed a little in his passionate misery. Sometimes, instead of snarling at his family, he would soften and throw himself upon their sympathy. He would take Milly with him when he went out to walk, holding her hand tenderly, supporting himself by her, as it seemed.

"Papa never speaks to me, May," Milly said, who was half-frightened, half-flattered by being thus chosen for her father's companion. He never says anything but 'My bonnie bairn!' And sometimes, 'May will be kind to her—May will be kind to her.' That is all he ever says."

"You must try and get him to talk, my dear," said Uncle Charles. "Make remarks, if it was only upon the sea and the rocks, or the fishing-boats, and the way they hang about in-shore. If he but said, 'Hoots! hold your tongue, Milly,' it would be something gained."

"Oh, Uncle Charles, what remarks can I make," said Milly, "and me so little? Only when he says May will be kind to me, I greet— I mean I cry; and then he pats me on the head.

As if I ever expected any other thing of May!"

"My little darling!" Marjory said, holding her close, "as if there was anybody, but a monster, that would not be kind to you."

Another time it would be Fleming who would be the expositor.

"Mr. Charlie should hurry hame," the old servant said, shaking his head. "I'm no a man of many words; but, Miss Marjory, he should hurry hame."

"I hope he is coming, Fleming, as fast as winds and waves can bring him."

"Lord! what's the good of that telegraph?" said Fleming. "If a body could travel by't, when they're sair wanted, it would be worth having—instead o' thae blackguard messages that plunge a hail house in trouble without a why or a wherefore. Ay, he should hurry hame."

"Why do you say so?" asked Marjory, more anxious than the others.

"Because—humph!" said Fleming, pausing, and looking round upon them. "Miss Marjory, a' the world's no young like you, and heedless. I

have my reasons. You ken nothing about it—nothing about it. Eh, but I hope he'll hurry hame!"

"He thinks my father is growing weaker," said Marjory to Fanshawe, as they continued their walk round that bit of velvet turf which crowned the cliff, "and I think so too."

"Not more than he has been always—that is since I came," said Fanshawe.

"Yes, more. And he has grown so gentle too—so gentle. Think of his saying I would be kind to Milly—making a merit of it! It goes to my heart."

"He was very cross this morning," said Fanshawe, off his guard.

"Cross! I am sorry I trouble you with such subjects," Marjory replied at once, with intense dignity. "Of course family details are always unimportant to strangers. Have you heard of a boat that will do for yachting? We do so little boating on the Firth, for ornament; it is all for very use."

"You would not have me make myself useful to the world in a fishing coble?" said Fanshawe,

ruefully, making a hundred apologies with his looks.

And then Marjory would laugh both at herself and him, and there would gather a dangerous blob of moisture in either eye.

Thus it will be seen this moment of waiting was not a solitary moment. It had come to be habitual with them to take that "turn" two or three times round the lawn, after breakfast, and again in the twilight after dinner, when the evenings were mild. It had been Mr. Heriot's custom always. His "turn" was part of the comfort of his meal. He had given it up, but somehow the others had resumed the habit. Mr. Charles would go once round with Milly before he disappeared to his tower, and then Milly would steal into her favourite corner by the open window, and the other two, sometimes not quite amicably, sometimes indifferently, sometimes with absent talk of all that might be coming, strayed round and round the mossy turf again. Insensibly to herself Marjory had come to look forward to that "turn."

Fanshawe was a stranger; he offended her

sometimes, sometimes he was in the way. She said to herself that she would be glad if he were gone, and wondered why he stayed. Yet there were things which he could understand better than Uncle Charles understood them. Whether he provoked her, or felt for her, somehow there was always an understanding beneath all. He was near her own age; he could enter into her feelings. Marjory did not often go so far as to discuss this question with herself, yet, without knowing it, she would say a great deal to the stranger as they took that turn round the lawn.

It was one morning after breakfast that the end of this long suspense came. They were on the cliff as usual, and as usual Mr. Charles and Milly had gone in. The letters were late that day. How is it that they are always late when they bring important news? Fanshawe by her side recognised Miss Bassett's writing on an English letter the moment that Marjory took it from the tray. He had seen the writing but once before, and he knew it. So did she. She trembled so that the other letters were scattered all about on the turf, where they lay, no one caring for them

Once more Marjory sat down on the mossy step of the sun-dial. She looked up at him pitifully as she tore open the envelope. He, scarcely less excited, leant over her. He was a stranger, and yet he read the letter over her shoulder, as if he had been her brother, feeling in that moment as her brother might have felt.

"I did not telegraph. I thought this would bring you the news soon enough. I am starting to come to you with poor Matty and her fatherless boys."

Marjory turned and raised her eyes to the anxious face leaning over her.

"Is that how you read it?" she asked, making a pitiful appeal. "I—I cannot see. Her fatherless boys. Charlie! Oh, my God! I cannot see any more."

The letter dropped from her hand. She put down her head upon her lap. She did not sob, or faint, but held herself fast, as it were, crushing herself in her own arms. Poor Marjory! The man by her side dared not put his arm round her to support her, and there was no one else to do so. While he stood by her, with his heart full of

pity, not knowing what to say or do, she made a sudden movement, and lifted the letter, thrusting it into his hand.

"Read it to me," she said, "read it—every word."

He sat down beside her upon the steps of the sun-dial. No thought of anything beyond the deepest and tenderest sympathy was in his mind. It was his impulse to draw her close to him, to shelter her as much as his arm could, to make himself her prop and support; and this for love, yet not for love—as her brother might have done it, not her lover. But he dared not make this instinctive demonstration of tender pity and fellow-feeling. He sat by her, and read the letter, while she listened with her head bent down upon her knees, and her face covered with her hands. In the cheerful morning sunshine, within shelter of the old house which was so deeply concerned, he read as follows, his voice sounding solemnly and awe-stricken, like a funeral service, but so low as to be audible only to her ear.

"I did not telegraph; I thought this would

reach you soon enough. I am starting to come to you with poor Matty, and her fatherless boys. I wish I knew how to tell you that it might be easier than the plain facts; but I do not know what else to say. Your brother died at sea soon after we left. I had got to be very fond of him. I will tell you all he said when I come. And I hope you will try to look over Matty's little faults—for he was very fond of her to the last.

"We shall arrive soon after you receive this. I am very, very sorry. I do not know what more to say.

"VERNA."

There was a long pause. She did not move or speak; she had to get over her grief as best she could, at once—to gulp it down, and think of the future, and how to tell her father he had no son. It was a hard effort, and this was the only moment she dared take to herself. As for Fanshawe, he sat beside her very sadly, looking at her, wondering if he ought to say anything—trying to think of something to say. What could he say?

not anything about resignation; nor that it was better for Charlie. How did he know whether or not it was better for Charlie? He felt sad himself to the bottom of his heart, as if it was he who had lost a brother. Tears had come to his eyes, which did not feel like tears of sympathy. Then he touched her shoulder, her dress, softly with the ends of his fingers—so lightly that it might have been the dropping of a leaf; it was all he dared to do. Marjory started all at once at this touch—light though it was.

"Yes," she said; "it is true; there is no time to sit and think. I must give orders about their rooms—and—my father must know."

"Miss Heriot, my heart aches for you. Tell me, what can I do?"

"Yes," said Marjory; "I know it; you are as kind as—a brother. Oh me! oh me!—but stop me, please; I must not cry. The first thing is—my father must know. Mr. Fanshawe, will you go and see where he is?—if he is in the library? It is cowardly; but I seem to want a moment first; a moment—all to myself—before I tell him. Will you see if he is there?"

"Let me take you in first. Yes, yes, I will go."

"Never mind me; do not think of me," said Marjory, nervously twining and untwining her hands. "And tell my uncle, please—and Fleming. Tell them; all except papa. God help him! it will kill him. It is I who must tell papa."

She looked so wild and woe-begone that he hesitated a moment; but she waved her hand to him almost with impatience. He looked back before he went into the house, and saw her sitting where he had left her—gazing into the vacant air before her, shedding no tears, twisting her fingers together; half crazed with the weight of trouble, which was more than she could bear.

Fanshawe went softly into the house; he felt, but more strongly, as Marjory herself had felt when she went into Pitcomlie with the news of Tom's illness. This secret, which was in his keeping, made him almost a traitor; he stole through the drawing-room, along the silent passage—nothing but sunshine seemed in the house—soft sunshine of the Spring, and fresh air, a little chilled by the sea, full of invigoration

and sweet life. He knocked softly at the library-door, feeling his heart beat, as if in his very look the poor father must read the secret. There was no answer; he knocked again; how still it was! Just as a traveller might have gone into an enchanted palace, seeing signs of life about, careful order and guardianship, but no living thing; just so had he come in. The rooms were empty, swept and garnished; there was not a sound to be heard but the steady ticking of the great old clock, which stood in the hall, and the throbs of his own heart; and still no answer to the knock. Persuaded that Mr. Heriot must have gone out, Fanshawe opened the door softly to peep in, and make certain before he returned to Marjory. To his surprise, the first thing he saw was that Mr. Heriot was in his usual place, in his usual chair, calmly seated at his writing table, paying no attention. The opening of the door, and Fanshawe's suppressed exclamation, "I did not know you were here, Sir," disturbed him apparently as little as the knocking had done. Fanshawe had no message to give; he had forgotten even to make up any pretext for his visit; he said hastily,

now feeling half ashamed of himself: "There is a book here I want to consult, if you will permit me," and without waiting for an answer, he went hastily to the shelf, where stood a number of tall county histories—books which Mr. Heriot prized. Turning his back on the old man at his table, he hastily selected one of these books. "I fear I disturb you, Sir," he said, in the easiest tone he could assume; "but in the first place, I thought you had gone out; and in the second place, I knew my business would not occupy a moment. I will put it safely back."

Somehow, it seemed to Fanshawe that a tone of levity had crept into his own voice; he spoke jauntily, as a man who is playing a part is so apt to do, and the light-minded tone came out all the more distinctly because this speech, like the others, received no answer. No answer; how still the room was! the fire burning brightly, but noiselessly, the sunshine coming in through the great window, nothing stirring, nothing breathing. Mr. Heriot had not moved; he had never even raised his head to look at his visitor; through all the fretfulness of his temper to the others he

had never been but polite and friendly to Tom's friend; and this strange rudeness struck the intruder all the more.

It seemed to Fanshawe as if a cold air began to blow fitfully in his face; and still Mr. Heriot did not move; he had not even raised his head to look at his visitor. Fanshawe stood still in the middle of the room hesitating; and then a curious moral impression, conveyed by the stillness, or by a subtle something more than the stillness, crept over him, he could not tell how; an icy chill went through him. It was cold he supposed, though why it should be cold in that warm room, with the fire burning and the sun shining, he could not tell. He approached a step nearer to the master of the house. "Mr. Heriot!" he said.

No answer still; not a word, not a movement. Was he asleep? Fanshawe drew nearer still with a shuddering curiosity. The old man's elbows were leaning on the table; one hand was extended flat out, every finger at its full length. The other held by a book which was supported on a reading-stand. His eyes were fixed upon this book with a heavy, dull stare, his chin

dropped a little. Had he fainted? Fanshawe drew closer and closer with a certain fascination. The long, listless hand upon the table lay grey and motionless, like something dead. Good God! was it death? But how could it be death? He had not heard the news. There was no reason why he should die in that tranquil brightness, everything so still around him, no murmur n the air of what was coming. It was impossible. In his certainty of this, Fanshawe touched the motionless hand. He withdrew instantly, with a hoarse and broken scream; the unexpected touch unmanned him. He called aloud for Marjory in his awe and terror—yes, terror, though he was a brave man. Marjory was seated, hopeless, in the sunshine, trying to subdue her own misery, trying to think how she could tell her father. But her father had stolen peacefully away, out of reach of that miserable news. He had gone out of hearing; nothing that could be said to him would move him more for ever.

Fanshawe stood in an agony of momentary uncertainty behind the chair. What should he

do? It seemed to him terrible to leave this ice-figure propped up here, without human watcher near. He called for Fleming with a paralysed sense of helplessness, without even the hope of being heard; and it seemed to him that the moments which passed were years. At length he was relieved in the strangest way. The door opened softly, and some one came in, He thought at the first glance it was one of the women-servants.

"Call Fleming to me; call Fleming, quick!" he cried.

The new-comer took no notice. She made no immediate reply. A small figure dressed in black, with curls clustering about her head, and a sweet but gently-complacent smile. She advanced towards the table smiling, making a sweeping curtsey. She did not look at Fanshawe, but at the figure in the chair, which to her was not awful. It was terrible to see this smooth little woman, in all the confidence of one who knew herself sure to please, with her conventional salutation, her company smile, coming calmly up, knowing nothing. She addressed her-

self to him who sat there with deaf ears, not seeing her.

"I do not know Fleming; I am Verna," she said.

CHAPTER XVI.

It would be hopeless to describe the condition of Pitcomlie during the rest of that terrible day. In the hall was the young widow with her children, an important English nurse, and the Ayah with the baby—the children crying, the Ayah moaning, and Mrs. Charles wondering why no one came to receive her; while in the library the scene was occurring which we have described. Marjory was still seated on the steps of the sundial. She had not heard anything; or rather some dim perceptions that something had happened had penetrated her stupor without rousing her to think what it was. Her whole mind was absorbed with one thought. She had not even time to grieve. She had to tell her father. Of

all that had ever fallen upon her in her life, this was the hardest to do. She allowed herself this interval of calm, because she was awaiting the return of her messenger. It was a pretext, she felt; but she took advantage of the pretext with such eagerness! and, perhaps, after all, he had gone out; perhaps she might have another moment of respite—perhaps—

Then she became vaguely aware of some commotion in the house. Milly was the first to rush out upon her.

"Oh! May, there's such funny folk in the hall; a black woman! with a white thing over her head—and little babies. Come, come and see; they're all asking for you; everybody wants you. Come, come and see."

"Babies!" said Marjory; and then, in spite of herself, burst into sudden tears.

The thought made her heart sick. It seemed impossible to rise up and welcome them, to receive these strangers in this first hour of trouble. Then Fleming, looking very pale, hurried across the lawn. The old man was heart-broken, but he could not be otherwise than acrid.

"This is a fine time to sit here and divert yoursel', Miss Marjory," he said, "when the house is full of strange folk, and no a soul knows what to do first. They've come; and mair than that—you'll know soon enough, soon enough; but Lordsake!" cried the old man, putting Milly aside almost roughly, "send that bairn away."

Marjory rose up, dragging herself painfully back into the busy world which awaits all the living, whosoever may be gone or dead. Then Mr. Charles was seen hurrying through the open window.

"What is this, May? What is all this I hear?" he cried. The news had been told to him by the servants, without any preparation, thrown at him in a lump as servants are fond of doing, and he was stunned by the succession of events. It seemed to him impossible to believe in their reality till he had come to her, who was the centre of the family life. Little Milly crying out of sympathy, knowing nothing, clung to her sister's dress—and Mr. Charles eager and anxious with his long lean person all in tremulous motion, put his hand on the sun-dial to

steady himself, and with agitated and white lips asked again, "What is it, May?" And at the other side of the house there suddenly appeared Fanshawe, supporting a lady on his arm. Marjory's bewildered mind fixed upon this. It was the only thing she did not understand. He placed the stranger on a seat and hurried across the lawn. "Give the lady a glass of wine," he cried peremptorily to Fleming, and then took Marjory's hand and drew it within his arm.

"Come in-doors," he said briefly, almost sternly, "they all fly to you, and it is you who ought to be considered most. Come in-doors."

"No," she said, "no, I must do it first; if they have come I must do that first; he must hear it from me."

"Come in," said Fanshawe peremptorily; but before he could lead her away, the stranger, whom he had brought to the air, came forward to Marjory.

"I am better now," she said. "I never fainted in my life before. It was such a shock. I know you are Miss Heriot, dear, and I know what you must be feeling. Don't mind us; I can

look after everything, I know how to make myself at home. Oh, poor thing, poor thing! father and brother in one day!"

"What does she mean?" said Marjory.

"My dear May, my dear May!" cried Mr. Charles. "Lord bless us! she does not know! Come in, come in, as Mr. Fanshawe says."

"Father and brother in one day? then my father is dead," said Marjory. She put both her hands on Fanshawe's arm, holding herself up. "Did you tell him? did he hear?"

"He had died in his chair, quite calmly, before the news came."

"You are sure—quite sure, he did not know?"

"Quite sure."

"Then thank God!" said Marjory. "Oh, I am glad. Don't say anything to me—I am glad. Milly, Milly, don't cry, go and say your prayers. I can't think of Charlie just now, I am so glad for papa."

"Oh, my dear! she has gone mad with grief," said Mr. Charles. "May, my bonnie May, cry, break your heart, anything would be better than this."

"I am not mad, I am glad. Thank God!" repeated Marjory. She suffered them to take her in, with a calm which frightened them all. Thus the chief actors, in all the excitement of a terrible crisis, went their way off the scene like a tragic procession, carrying with them their atmosphere of pain and trouble; and like the change in a theatre, another set of sentiments, another group of persons, came uppermost.

Miss Bassett was left in possession of the lawn. She had received a shock, but she felt better already, and she was a curious little personage. She watched them go in, making her own observations, especially in respect to Fanshawe, whose presence struck her feminine eye at once. Who was he? engaged to Miss Heriot, she concluded; it was the most natural explanation. Then she went across the lawn to the edge of the cliff and looked over; then made a turn or two up and down, putting up an eye-glass to her eye, inspecting the house. The house was very satisfactory; it had an air of old establishment, wealth, and comfort that pleased her.

"Only I would clear away all these old ruins,"

she said, turning her glass upon the tall old Manor-house of Pitcomlie, and Mr. Charles's tower, "and throw out a new wing," she added, putting her head a little on one side, "with a nice sheltered flower-garden and conservatories." This notion pleased her still more. "What a different place it would look," she continued musing, "if I had it in my hands; I would clear away all the old rubbish, I would make a handsome entrance with a portico and steps. I would soon make an end of all those little old-fashioned windows, and have plate-glass everywhere. Dear me, dear me, what a pity poor Charlie was not the eldest son!"

From this it will be apparent that the newcomer was not aware of what had happened in the family upon which she had arrived so suddenly. When she had examined the house quite at her leisure, she bethought herself of the helpless party she had left in the hall, and made her way to them round the front, finding the way by instinct with a cleverness which never forsook her. "I wonder what they will do with Matty," she said to herself. "I wonder what the new

Mr. Heriot is like. I have seen his photograph, but I don't recollect. I wonder if he is married· If he is not married, Matty's little boy will be the heir-apparent, or heir-presumptive, is it? and they will make much of him. Fancy grown people like Matty and myself being tacked on to little Tommy to give us importance! If he was not Charlie's brother Matty might marry him. As for me, that does not seem my line; at least I have never done it yet, after being in India and all. It is droll how people differ. Matty is a fool and as selfish as a little cat; but she is the marrying one. Never mind, I shall do as well for myself. How awful that old man looked, to be sure—I shall dream of him all my life; but don't let's think of that. Oh, you poor dear Charlie, how nice it would have been if you had lived, and if you had been the eldest son!"

Fresh from this reverie she met at the door Mrs. Simpson, the housekeeper, who had just cleared the frightened and excited servants out of the hall, and was closing the shutters with her own hands, and crying softly between whiles

with many a murmured exclamation. Miss Bassett was very conciliatory, almost respectful to the old servants.

"Can you tell me, please, where I shall find my sister and the children?" she said. "What a dreadful day for us to come, the day of your poor dear master's death! I am so sorry to give you so much more trouble on such a day."

"Oh mem, never name the trouble," said Mrs. Simpson, "if anything could be a comfort it would be the sight of thae dear bairns, that he didna live to see, poor man. Eh, it's an awfu' lesson to the rest of us, to be taken like that without a moment's preparation, reading a common book, that could be of no use to his soul. Eh Sirs! In an ordinary way I'm no feared for death. It's what must come to us all; but death like that—"

"I am sure though," said Miss Bassett confidently, "by the look of his face that he was a good man. There was a believing look about him. I feel sure all is well with him, and if it is a loss to us, you know it is a gain to him."

"Eh, what a pious good young lady," said

Mrs. Simpson to herself; "we maun aye hope so," she said aloud, but with much less certainty. She was a Seceder, and not quite certain of her master's salvation. "He didna take his troubles may be so well as he might have done. They say it's a sure sign of the children of light when they're resigned, whatever God sends; but oh, it's no for us to judge," said Mrs. Simpson, putting her apron to her eyes. "I hope you're better, mem. It was a sore trial for a young lady, going in like that to the presence of death. I'll show you upstairs where the other lady is, and if you'll just ring there's a maid will see to everything. Meals and hours will be all wrong the day in this mourning house; but you're a considerate young lady and ye'll look over it—for to-day."

"Oh, don't trouble about us," said the newcomer, giving Mrs. Simpson one of her sweetest smiles, "I like you so much for being grieved for your master. Never think of us—" Miss Bassett was very popular among the servants wherever she went. She gave a little nod and smile to a housemaid she met on the stairs.

She was very conciliatory. The youngest son's wife's sister has little reason to think herself an important personage in any house; and as she went up the great staircase and through the long noiseless carpeted corridor which led to the west wing, her respect for the house rose higher. She noted that the carpet was Turkey carpet, that every corner was covered, no matting, no boards visible, nothing that showed the least desire for economy. She was not used to any English house except the very thrifty one in which Matilda and she had received their education, and these details of luxury were very pleasant to her. She sighed as she went into the pretty room where her sister and the children were already established. It was the largest room in the wing, the end room with two large windows looking over the peaceful sunshiny country, and one in the side which had a peep of the sea. There were large wardrobes, a great marble dressing-table, a succession of mirrors, a magnificent canopied bed, and more Turkey carpets, feeling like moss beneath the feet. The handsome room,

however, was already made into a disorderly nursery. Matilda had thrown her hat down on the writing-table, where it lay among the pens and ink, covered over in its turn by the children's hats and pelisses. She had thrown herself on the sofa, where she lay, tired and dishevelled, making ineffectual remonstrances with Tommy, who was belabouring the floor with an ivory-backed brush which he had found on the dressing-table. Baby was sprawling on the lap of the dark Ayah, who sat squatted on the floor near her mistress's feet, and the English maid was unpacking all the boxes at once, finding all sorts of heterogeneous things in the different packages.

"Bother that black thing," she said indignantly as Miss Bassett entered, "here's baby's short things all bundled up in mistress's best shawl. There ain't a thing where I can lay my hand on it, and all the place in a litter already."

Miss Bassett did her best to remedy the muddle. She seized the brush out of Tommy's hand, and put him spell-bound in the corner. She pulled off her sister's shawl, which hung half

over the arm of the sofa. She ranged the hats upon the bed and cleared the writing-table.

"Matty! for heaven's sake," she said, "we have come to a nice tidy place, and they seem disposed to treat you handsomely. This must be one of the best rooms, don't make a pigsty of it the very first day."

"I like that," said Matilda languidly; she was a pretty, listless, fair young woman, with light hair, without any colour in it, and blue eyes, which were somewhat cold and steely. "Where have you been to, Verna? You went and left us all by ourselves, to get on as we could; and but for that nice fat woman who brought us upstairs, I do not know what we should have done. Of course, the children must be made comfortable. She said we were to have all the rooms in this end. When you can get them cleared away, and things put straight, I think I shall go to bed and have a good sleep."

"Then you don't want to know anything about the family?" said her sister.

"The family! oh, I suppose Marjory will come to see me by-and-by. I don't want her till I

have had a sleep, and I told the fat woman so. I shall cry when she comes, I know; and it tires me out to cry. I want a sleep first. I suppose you have seen them all; you always see everybody first. Are they nice? do they look good-natured? do you think they mean us to stay here, or what am I to do? Who is knocking at the door? Oh, I know; it is the fat woman with the tea."

"Hush, for heaven's sake!" said Verna; "do think for a moment; everything depends on how you behave. Elvin, don't let anyone in just yet. Matty, listen; old Mr. Heriot—your father-in-law—Charlie's father, died this morning. The house is all in confusion."

"Died this morning!" Matilda's lip began to quiver, her eyes filled suddenly with tears, her face acquired all at once the pitiful look of a child's face in sudden trouble. "Oh," she said, "must some one be always dying wherever we go? It is dreadful. I cannot bear to be in a house where there is some one dead. I never was so in my life. Verna, take the baby; take us away, take us away!"

"I will kill you!" cried her sister passionately,

turning on her, clenching her little fist in Matilda's face. "You fool! hold your ridiculous tongue when the servants come in; cry as much as you please; you can do that. It will make them think you can feel, though you have a heart as hard—Cry! if you can't do anything else. Thank you very much," she said, turning round suddenly and changing her tone in the twinkling of an eye. It was Mrs. Simpson herself who had entered, attended by a maid with a tray. The housekeeper was deeply in want of some counteracting excitement, and she knew that the two babies on the floor were the only representatives of the house, though their mother did not. She came in with a jug of cream in her hand, very solemn and tearful, ready to weep at a moment's notice, yet eager to explain, and tell the sad story—full of natural womanly interest about the children, as well as anxiety touching the little heir and his mother. In short, the housekeeper was like most other people—she had good, maternal motives, and she had an alloy of interested ones. Had the young widow been a poor woman, Mrs. Simpson's kindness would have been more disin-

terested; but in the present circumstances, it was impossible not to recollect that the young woman crying on the sofa, who looked so innocent and childish in her sorrow, might be the future mistress of the house, and have everything in her hand.

"Oh, mem!" said Mrs. Simpson; "what is there we wadna do—every one in the house—for poor Mr. Chairlie's lady, and thae two bonnie bairns! Oh, Mistress Chairles! dinna break your heart like that! there's plenty cause; but think on your two bonnie lads that will live to be a credit to everyone belonging to them, and a' the hope now that we have in this distressed house. Oh, get her to take some tea; get her to lie down and rest! So young and so bonnie, and her man taken from her, and a home-coming like this!"

"My sister is very tired," said Verna; "indeed, as you say, it is a very sad home-coming. She cannot thank you to-day, you kind woman; but to-morrow I hope she will be better. We have had a terrible journey. And she feels it so much," added the quick-witted creature, seeing

Mrs. Simpson's eye linger upon Matilda's coloured gown, "having no mourning to come in; no widow's cap. You must tell me afterwards whether there is a dress-maker here whom we can have. What did you say, dear? will you try some tea? Cry! you fool!" she whispered fiercely, turning aside to her sister, "and don't speak."

"But, Verna—a cap!" Once more Matilda put on that piteous look; her lips quivered; large tears rolled down her cheek; she put her hand up to her pretty light hair.

"Yes, that is the first thing," said the wiser sister. "Will you please send for the dress-maker? Perhaps we can get her a cap in the village. That is all she thinks of; she would not like to see dear Miss Heriot without her cap."

"Miss Marjory is not in a state to see anybody," said the housekeeper, shaking her head; "she's taking her trouble hard—hard. She's no resigned, as she ought to be. And this is the little heir? Eh, my bonnie man! but I'm glad, glad to see you here!"

"Yes, this is the eldest," said Verna, puzzled; "he is called Tom, after his poor grandpapa. Then young Mr. Heriot is not married?"

The housekeeper shook her head solemnly. "Na, na! Mr. Tom wasna a man to marry; and oh, to think the auld house should depend upon a little bairn."

Then the good woman put her apron to her eyes. Verna watched her every look and movement, and already her attention and curiosity were awakened; but she would not show her ignorance of the family affairs; and she was glad to get Mrs. Simpson out of the room, fearing the outburst which was coming. It came almost before she had closed the door upon the housekeeper's ample gown.

"Oh you cruel, cruel Verna!" cried the young widow. "Oh you barbarous, unfeeling thing! a cap! I will never wear a cap; as if it was not bad enough to lose Charlie, and come home here like this, and cry my eyes out, and have to please everybody; instead of my own house, and being my own mistress, as I was while dear Charlie

was living; but to put on a hideous cap—I will not, I will not! With light hair it is dreadful; I will rather die!"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

London: Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street.

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